The Historical Negation of Aesthetic Categories: Adorno's Inheritance of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

By

Justin Neville Kaushall

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University of Warwick, Department of Philosophy

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Abbreviations

AT Adorno, Theodor W., *Aesthetic Theory*, Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedemann (eds.), Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans), (London and New York, 1997).

CJ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, Werner S. Pluhar (trans), with a Foreword by Mary J. Gregor (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1987). Hereafter I will reference the *Critique of Judgment* using this order: first the Section number, second the German *Akademie* edition pagination, and finally Pluhar's English edition pagination.

MM Adorno, Theodor W., *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* E. F. N. Jephcott (trans), (London and New York, 2002).

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When I was younger I naively imagined that a PhD student composed her thesis in total solitude, like some eccentric visionary, isolated from society. It has taken me nearly a decade and a half to realize that nothing could be further from the truth. I owe enormous debts to many different individuals, organizations, and experiences that I can never repay. By briefly acknowledging them here I hope to at least gesture towards my sincere gratitude, and to outline the helpful role that others have performed. I have learned over time that a debt, or historical inheritance, may never be returned or reversed, that it often reappears, occasionally with a vengeance, in a transformed guise, and that, finally, it never rests in peace.

First, my advisors, Professor Diarmuid Costello and Professor Nick Lawrence, have been enormously helpful and generous. Their endless patience, critical attention, practical advice, and kind encouragement during chaotic times have always been extremely supportive. Diarmuid and Nick both helped me to find and clarify my own argument, to be more independent and creative, and to embody the spirit of critique in my engagement with both Adorno and Kant; for all of that, and more, I am very grateful. They have also demonstrated how to work relentlessly hard in order to achieve an end.

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Finally, much love and gratitude is due to Claire and Rose. Both have tolerated my obsessive routines and many bad habits with grace, kindness, love, and understanding. I would like to dedicate this thesis to Rose: in memory and promise.

Last but not least, I am very grateful to both of my parents for their love and support from the very beginning. Without both of you—zero.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree at another university.

I presented material included in Chapter Three at a conference in Rennes, France, entitled "What is the relevance of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Today?". The conference occurred in October 2017.

Part of Chapters One and Two were also used at the Kent Postgraduate Conference in Aesthetics, in Kent, England, in 2014.

Finally, part of Chapter Two was used at the 2013 UK Kant Society annual conference in London.

Needless to say, all of the material used above has been edited, reworked, and revised extensively.

Abstract

In this thesis I argue that philosophy must reflect on historical experience, and must even consider itself a mode of such experience, if it is to remain materially grounded. Adorno's enigmatic formula in *Aesthetic Theory*—that philosophy requires art, and that art requires philosophy—ought to be interpreted in the following manner: since art expresses history in sedimented aesthetic form, philosophy requires artworks in order to access the material conditions that ground its own reflective activity; and, conversely, since historical sedimentation may only be made critically available through philosophical theorizing, art requires philosophy, so that tradition's potential for new directions may be rescued from its conservative and regressive tendencies. In order to investigate these issues, I argue also that Adorno's aesthetic thought is indebted to Kant's third *Critique*. Specifically, many Kantian aesthetic categories are present in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. Their presence, however, is qualified, because Adorno employs Hegelian determinate negation to critically examine traditional concepts. In this way, Adorno retrieves and reinvigorates the tradition of philosophical aesthetics while critically interrogating the assumptions and principles present in Kantian concepts that must be revised, transformed, and altered, not least in light of the catastrophe of twentieth century history. Kant's categories, while emerging from the contradictions of their era, fail to meet the demands placed on them by modern experience; Adorno's revised categories are needed in order to address the historical-social situation of modernity.

Many scholars and commentators have analyzed the philosophical and aesthetic legacy that Adorno inherits from Kant. For example, Tom Huhn argues that the Kantian aesthetic object is necessarily opaque, or blind to the historical and social content that lies within it.[1] Gene Ray argues that the category of the sublime needs to be historicized in light of the Nazi genocide.[2] Murray Skees discusses the difference between Kant's

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[1] Tom Huhn, 'Kant, Adorno, and the Social Opacity of the Aesthetic', in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (eds), *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge and London, 1997).

[2] Gene Ray, 'Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime', in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 17 (Spring, 2004), pp. 1-18.

concept of autonomy and Adorno's.[3] Joel Whitebook addresses the dual influences of Freud and Kant on Adorno; he argues that the synthesis of the diffuse, in order to construct a coherent self, always leads to violence.[4] Tracey Stark argues that Adorno seeks to rehabilitate Kantian reflective judgment in his aesthetics.[5] Thierry de Duve argues that Adorno misreads Kantian categories through a Hegelian lens, and that his concept of reconciliation is incoherent.[6] Peter Uwe Hohendahl discusses Adorno's critique of Kant's subjectivism and reviews Adorno's reception of several categories in the third *Critique*: aesthetic autonomy, natural beauty, the sublime, and the transcendental subject.[7] Anthony Cascardi argues that Kant's concept of aesthetic reflective judgment preserves qualitative particularity in the subject's feeling, which cannot be fully captured in discursive concepts; thus, he tries to redeem Kant's concept for Adorno's aesthetics.[8] Ross Wilson claims that Adorno rehabilitates Kant's model of dialectical aesthetic experience, in which the subject tries to rescue objectivity through subjective mediation.[9] David Roberts discusses the Kantian sublime in terms of shock, which allows repressed

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[3] Murray W. Skees, 'Kant, Adorno and the Work of Art', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37:8 (2011), pp. 915-933.

[4] Joel Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects: On Adorno's Kant-Freud Interpretation', in Tom Huhn (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (Cambridge, 2004).

[5] Tracey Stark, 'The Dignity of the Particular: Adorno on Kant's Aesthetics', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 24, No. 2/3 (1998), pp. 61-83.

[6] Thierry De Duve, 'Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant', in Jay Bernstein, Claudia Brodsky, and Anthony Cascardi (eds), *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno* (The Townsend Center for the Humanities, No. 3, University of California, Berkeley, 2010), pp. 249-291.

[7] Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'Nature and the Autonomy of Art: Adorno as a Reader of Kant', *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Fall 2012), pp. 247-257.

[8] Anthony Cascardi, 'The Consequences of Enlightenment', in Simon Jarvis (ed.), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume II* (4 vols, London and New York, 2007).

[9] Ross Wilson, 'Dialectical Aesthetics and the Kantian *Rettung*: On Adorno's Aesthetic Theory', *New German Critique*, Volume 35, Number 2, Summer 2008, pp. 55-69.

nature to speak, and which briefly releases the subject from her imprisonment.[10] Brian O'Connor provides an incisive and detailed examination how Kantian and Hegelian concepts and principles compose and organize *Negative Dialectics*.[11] Jay Bernstein provides an in depth and brilliant reading of various Kantian categories and their role in forming and grounding Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.[12] Espen Hammer argues that Adorno's aesthetic and social theory is a unique response to modernity, and the crises that arise in it; he analyses Adorno's debt to the aesthetics and metaphysics of Kant and Hegel.[13] Kalliopi Nikolopoulou analyses Kant's concept of *sensus communis* and applies it to the social nature of poetic language.[14] Wilhelm S. Wurzer analyses how Adorno criticizes the Kantian transcendental subject and argues that, for Adorno, the Kantian imagination is the realm of nature.[15] Finally, Surti Singh argues, against Albrecht Wellmer, that Adorno's concept of the shudder is cognitive rather than emotional, and that the shudder, contrary to the Kantian sublime, reveals the finite materiality of the subject, rather than spiritually transcending it.[16]

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[10] David Roberts, 'Aura and Aesthetics of Nature', *Thesis Eleven*, Number 36 (1993), pp. 127-137.

[11] Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge and London, 2005).

[12] J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1992). See also J. M. Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions: Modernism's Critique of Idealism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Volume 22, Number 6 (2014), pp. 1069-1094.

[13] Espen Hammer, *Adorno's Modernism: Art, Experience, and Catastrophe* (Cambridge, 2015).

[14] Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, 'As If: Kant, Adorno and the Politics of Poetry', *Modern Language Notes*, Volume 121, Number 3 (April 2006), pp. 757-773.

[15] Wilhelm S. Wurzer, 'Kantian Snapshot of Adorno: Modernity Standing Still', in Max Pensky (ed.), *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern*, (Albany, 1997).

[16] Surti Singh, 'The Aesthetic Experience of Shudder: Adorno and the Kantian Sublime', in T*he Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings in Benjamin and Adorno*, Nathan Ross (ed.), (Lanham and Boulder, 2015).

In the course of the thesis I seek to answer three main questions: Does Adorno engage with Kantian categories in *Aesthetic Theory*? Why should we accept Adorno's discovery that art requires philosophy, and that philosophy requires art? And, why should we accept Adorno's aesthetic categories as grounded in historical experience, and Kant's aesthetic categories as incapable of responding to such experience?

My own goals consist in shedding light on Adorno's inheritance of Kant's third *Critique*, which has not been comprehensively researched; analyzing certain categories in *Aesthetic Theory* that have only been partially examined by other scholars; demonstrating a unique reading of Adorno's concept of interpretation that fits in with the trajectory of his philosophy as a whole; articulating a reading of Adorno's thesis that art requires philosophy, and that philosophy requires art; and, finally, arguing that philosophy must excavate, and reflect on, historical experience if philosophy is to remain critical, and if it is to avoid succumbing to conservative convention, or the mere reproduction of ideology.

Introduction

"One must have tradition in oneself, to hate it properly"

--Adorno[17]

In this thesis I argue that, in modernity, philosophical reflection is only possible if it takes account of, and recognizes itself as, historical reflection. I define modernity as the consequence of an irrational and instrumental logic[18] that distorts qualitative particularity and leaves rational subjects bereft of their relationship to nature; thus, although modernity so defined stretches from the European Enlightenment in the seventeenth century through the horrors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and through to the present, its development is jagged, rather than linear, and it is marked by the irrational distortion of the subject-object relationship rather than by any temporal limits. Instrumental reason infiltrates subjective experience and thought; in addition, it forms the capitalist definition of value. Philosophical idealism, broadly considered as the doctrine that material and particular qualities may be reduced to subjective and conceptual quantities, arises in modernity, and drives reason's irrationality (in addition to capitalism). I define historical reflection as a form of knowledge that recognizes its own mode of cognizing as a manifestation of historical and social concretion or sedimentation. Historical reflection is, in part, historical experience, defined as the conscious reception of the material processes that have constituted, or destroyed, objects and concepts over time. Adorno claims in his lectures on 'Metaphysics' that "the mediatedness of thought is contained in this traditional moment, in the implicit history that is present within any cognition."[19] The history present within concepts may be neutral, corrosive, or beneficial. Investigation is required to ascertain how historical sedimentation affects concepts, objects, and experience in general. Adorno continues:

> it is also naïve to believe that it [thought] can divest itself entirely of this [traditional] moment. The truth probably lies in a kind of self-reflection that both

[17] Theodor W. Adorno, MM, p. 52.
[18] Thanks to Nick Lawrence for clarifying this aspect of modernity for me.
[19] Theodor W. Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, Rolf Tiedemann (ed), Rodney Livingstone and others (trans) (Stanford, 2003), p. 463.

> recognizes the inalienable presence of the traditional moment within knowledge, and critically identifies the dogmatic element in it—instead of creating a tabula rasa on both sides, as now, and thus succumbing either to dogmatism or to a timeless and therefore inherently fictitious positivism.[20]

While subjectivity cannot escape history, the subject should not assume that her history is her destiny. It is necessary to engage with historical experience in order to become aware of the forces that have shaped subjectivity, and the social totality. Such traditional or historical experience is distilled and revealed most clearly in artworks' expression—as Adorno demonstrates in *Aesthetic Theory*. For this reason, philosophical reflection requires aesthetic experience so that reflection may be grounded in historical experience.

Since aesthetic expression is composed of materiality or objectivity, the experience of artworks requires philosophical reflection. Without such reflection, the subject would risk reproducing, or uncritically presenting, reality, rather than critically comprehending it.[21] Such reflection begins when the subject encounters the work and tries to interpret it. Without such reflection, the awareness of historical suffering would be entangled with tradition and convention—that is, with reified experience.[22] We may define aesthetic experience as the somatic awareness of the nonidentity of object and subject: the fact that reason fails to capture objectivity. The constellation of history, philosophy, and aesthetics requires deciphering if it is to be understood.

Hence the thesis responds to several questions that Adorno does not resolve in his great, unfinished work *Aesthetic Theory*: What is the relationship between philosophical reflection and aesthetic experience? Why does Adorno assert that philosophy requires art,

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[20] Adorno, *Can One Live*…, p. 463.
[21] Adorno, *Can One Live*…, pp. 438-439.

[22] O'Connor defines reification as "a state of affairs in which there are only quantitative and therefore mutually translatable differences within and between objects." See Brian O'Connor, 'Freedom Within Nature: Adorno on the Idea of Reason's Autonomy,' In *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian Thought, Volume II, Historical, Social and Political Thought*. Nicolas Boyle, Liz Disley, and John Walker (eds), (Cambridge, 2013), p. 214. For the classical definition of reification that influenced Adorno and the other members of the Institute for Social Research profoundly, see Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, Rodney Livingstone (trans), (London, 1971).

and that art requires philosophy? How can two different modes of cognition—one that operates with rational principles and the other with somatic processes—work together in the subject? How does history weave itself into philosophical and aesthetic cognition? How can the Western philosophical and aesthetic traditions continue after the Holocaust (as well as other modern massacres such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade in America and Britain, and the British Empire's brutal legacy in India and across the globe)—which challenges and undermines those theories in the Western tradition that claim transcendence and a priori insight?

I argue against the idea that philosophical reflection, and aesthetic experience, should occur without consideration for historical, cultural, or social factors. Kant, for instance, implicitly maintains that such factors serve to contaminate, rather than concretize, philosophical reflection or aesthetic experience.[23] Kant's conception of autonomy essentially isolates formal knowledge from material experience.[24] Instead, I argue that the aesthetic experience and philosophical reflection may only work together to produce cognition if historical, cultural, and social experiences are not divorced from subjectivity. Aesthetic experience requires philosophical reflection because the latter critically investigates the historical aspects of artworks, which must be interpreted and encountered; in the same way, philosophical reflection requires aesthetic experience because the latter gives materiality or objectivity—in the form of historical experience—to cognition. The result of the confrontation between subject and object is the realization of nonidentity—which forces the subject to reflect on the disintegration of reason, and thereby to attain a measure of self-knowledge.

Interpreting an artwork in order to uncover historical experience, however, should not merely be a process of conceptualizing and systematically determining the alleged static meaning of a work. Instead of constructing universal categories, we must engage

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[23] See Ginsborg, Hannah, 'Kant on the Subjectivity of Taste,' in Herman Parret (ed), *Kant's Asthetik, Kant's Aesthetics, L'esthetique du Kant* (Berlin and New York: 1998), pp. 450-452.

[24] See Berel Lang, 'Kant and the Subjective Objects of Taste,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 25 (Spring, 1967), pp. 247-253.

with concrete particularity: that which cannot be rationally grasped in its entirety.[25] Samuel Beckett is aware of the danger that the universal may distort the particular, as James McNaughton[26] notes. He argues that Beckett revised his position towards modern art after he visited Nazi Germany in 1936 and was appalled and shocked by what he saw.[27] McNaughton writes that Beckett came to realize that "rationalising the chaos of history can generate dangerously irrational historical narratives that lead from censorship and war".[28] After his experience in Nazi Germany, Beckett "claims that he himself has no sense of history and he stresses the importance of recognizing the fallibility of cause-and-effect logic...[In addition, Beckett] appears reluctant to analyse politically his experience in Germany; and he puts forth as a virtue his inability to conceptualise art, history, and literature with master-narratives".[29] Beckett's claim that he "has no sense" of history suggests that he cannot rationalize historical events, or place them in a teleological chain.[30] History, however, must be reflectively engaged with if subjects are to become aware of their inheritance. Beckett comes to realize the danger of assuming that history operates on first principles that assign meaning and purpose to each and every historical occurrence in the name of a greater whole.[31] Arguably, Beckett's extreme and patient attention to ghastly emptiness, nothingness, and meaninglessness is an expression of his reluctance to impose meaning on subjects, objects, and events.[32] In Germany in 1936, Beckett declares:

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[25] See Raymond Geuss, 'Art and Criticism in Adorno's Aesthetics,' *European Journal of Philosophy, 6 (1998),* pp. 297-317. "Works of art for Adorno are inherently useless objects which present an 'image' (*Bild*) of a kind of meaninglessness and freedom which society promises its members but does not provide...it violates the Enlightenment principle of universal functionalism, that is, the principle that everything must be useful for something, and that the meaningful and the functional are inherently connected" (302).

[26] See James McNaughton, 'Beckett, German Fascism, and History: The Futility of Protest', in *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 15, (2005), pp. 101-116.

[27] McNaughton, 'Beckett, German Fascism…', p. 101-102.

[28] McNaughton, 'Beckett, German Fascism…', p. 102.

[29] McNaughton, 'Beckett, German Fascism…', p. 105.

[30] McNaughton, 'Beckett, German Fascism…', p. 105.

[31] Adorno, *Can One Live…*, p. 428.

[32] McNaughton, 'Becket, German Fascism…', p. 107.

> I am not interested in a 'unification' of the historical chaos any more than I am in the 'clarification' of the individual chaos, and still less in the anthropomorphisation of the inhuman necessities that provoke the chaos. What I want is the straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births and deaths […] I say the background and the causes are inhuman and incomprehensible machinery and venture to wonder what kind of appetite it is that can be appeased by the modern animism that consists in rationalising them...I say the expressions 'historical necessity' and 'Germanic destiny' start the vomiting moving upwards.[33]

Beckett declines to employ reason in order to justify the irrational; instead, he seeks to cut a path through irrationality in order to experience its contours. This method enables particularity, rather than universality, to speak. Beckett's obsession with "flotsam" (literally, the sea-borne remnants of a shipwreck) indicates that, for him, subjectivity is mostly at the mercy of various currents that carry us far from our original intentions, and which often override our rationality, which remains a passive recipient of material; thus, rational reflection must not presume that it may transcend historical and social objectivity.[34] The description of the historical situation as a shipwreck also implies that we cannot return to a single origin that might allow us to put the world back together again. As Adorno asserts,

> …it is idle and futile for thought to attempt now to appropriate metaphysics as a collection of pure categories that are immediate to consciousness, since knowledge can never disown its own mediatedness, or, in other words, its dependence on culture in every sense. Philosophy is itself a piece of culture, is enmeshed in culture; and if it behaves as if it were rendered immediate by some allegedly primal questions that elevate it above culture, it blinds itself to its own conditions and truly succumbs to its cultural conditionality; in other words, it becomes straightforward ideology. There is no knowledge that can repudiate its mediations; it can only reflect them.[35]

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[33] McNaughton, 'Becket, German Fascism…', p. 107.
[34] McNaughton, 'Becket, German Fascism…', p. 107.
[35] Adorno, *Can One Live*…, p. 453.

In order to develop Adorno's argument that philosophical reflection is irreducibly mediated, I argue that Adorno's aesthetic thought constitutes a critical reception of Kantian aesthetics. This specific argument grounds my broader claim in the thesis: that philosophical reflection must engage with artworks if it is to become aware of historical experience; and, that artworks require philosophical reflection if they are to become critically open to subjectivity.

The question of precisely how Adorno inherits the tradition of German philosophy has been discussed in many different ways. For instance, Tom Huhn claims that Adorno and Kant both place utopian hope in aesthetic judgment: "Adorno is a faithful Kantian both in his elaboration of the subject of aesthetics and in the subjectivity he imagines is constituted by aesthetic judgment.... The most profound intimacy between Kant and Adorno's texts lies precisely in the inextinguishability of the aesthetic hope for reconciliation within human life."[36] While it is true that Kant and Adorno share a common belief in the power of reason, and in the force of critique, Adorno's conception of reconciliation differs profoundly from Kant's. This is the case for several reasons. First, Kant analyses the subject into a priori and empirical categories, which are never placed in their proper social-cultural context; unlike Hegel's philosophical revolution, the Kantian subject is neither historical nor natural nor social. Second, Kant is highly uncritical towards the unethical social practices that defined the history of his own time. For example, discussions of trans-Atlantic slavery, or the exploitation of colonialist expansion, cannot be found in Kant's political and historical writings. Indeed, for Kant, the transcendental subject is wholly autonomous from historical, natural, and social materiality—because, of course, the a priori subject itself provides the ground for the experience of such materiality. Such a rigid model of subject-object interaction has consequences for Kant's aesthetic categories, which cannot fulfill the postulates of his critical philosophy while also providing a rich, complex experience of the aesthetic object. Finally, Kant fails to diagnose the social pathology that was already eroding society in the 1790s, and he fails to predict the destructive effects that the emancipation

[36] Tom Huhn, 'Adorno and Kant,' in Michael Kelly (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics 1* (2 vols, Oxford, 1998), pp. 29-32.

of the subject would have on material nature. These failures can be detected in Kant's third *Critique*, and in Adorno's amended categories in *Aesthetic Theory*.

Adorno argues that reconciliation occurs when material nonidentity is allowed to finally be itself, and when the subject may receptively follow that material without trying to impose categories upon it; Kant argues that reconciliation occurs when the subject's freedom is able to appear in aesthetic judgment (for instance, in the sublime, or in aesthetic ideas) as the opposite of natural determination. At the same time, Adorno recognizes that—after the trauma of modern history, from the massacres of Native Americans in the seventeenth century to the Nazi death camps in the twentieth—the European philosophical and aesthetic tradition cannot merely carry on as before: a serious and ground-shaking investigation into the complicity of culture with the horrors of history must take place. Adorno cannot inherit Kant's concept of reason without repressing the violence of modern history. For this reason, Adorno's dialectically critiques Kant's concept of reason. In his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno remarks: "And I do indeed hold the view that the profundity of a philosophy can only be measured by the profundity of its errors—rather than by the smooth success of its harmonious conclusions."[37] Thus Adorno's critical and negative remarks about Kant (and other thinkers, such as Hegel, Schelling, and Freud) must be taken in context. Harmonious conclusions often serve, for Adorno, to obscure contradictions in a work that should not be merely conjured away. Harmony is an attempt to guarantee a systematic method that only confronts objectivity indirectly, from above. Thus the possibility of error is necessary because it enables the subject to grasp, briefly, the difference between subjective concept and objective material, as Adorno observes in his lectures on 'Metaphysics.'[38]

Albrecht Wellmer, in contrast to Huhn, maintains that Adorno cannot accept the Kantian Absolute:

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[37] Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's* Critique of Pure Reason, Rolf Tiedemann (ed), Stanley Livingstone (trans), (Cambridge and Oxford, 2001), p. 219.
[38] Adorno, *Can One Live*…, pp. 466-467.

> In contrast to Kant, for Adorno not only the representation and the cognition of the Absolute, but the mere thought of the Absolute has become problematical. Although Adorno follows Kant in maintaining that each thought, that the very idea of truth contains an unavoidable, if only oblique reference to the Absolute—and therefore to the idea of reconciliation—at the same time he shows...that this unavoidable reference point of all thinking cannot itself be thought, that it defies the possibilities of conceptual articulation.[39]

The Kantian Absolute would be the supersensible ground that both nature and freedom share. This ground is of course unknowable for Kant because it is inaccessible to empirical cognition; it is only thinkable through rational speculation. The concept of the Absolute has lost its authority for Adorno because the subject cannot posit a transcendental ground that remains independent of historical and social reality; any ground may only be reached through the historical mediations of that reality. Historical experience has altered the structure of reason, which means that freedom is limited by material reality. As a result, philosophical speculation cannot overlook history in an attempt to abstractly overcome materiality; rather, philosophy must reflect upon historical experience.

J. M. Bernstein asserts that Adorno reads Kant's aesthetic categories "as the historical categories of modern art" in an effort to "comprehend historically the aporia of Kantian aesthetics."[40] I argue a slightly different thesis: that Adorno interprets Kantian categories as unable to respond adequately to, or resist, instrumental reason, and that Adorno's critique of tradition involves the necessary transfiguration of conventional categories (the beautiful, the sublime, etc.) into new ones (aesthetic semblance, the shudder, etc.), in order to remain as close as possible to objective historical experience,

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[39] Albrecht Wellmer, 'Adorno, Modernity, and the Sublime,' in *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern,* Max Pensky (ed), (Buffalo, 1997), p. 113.

[40] J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, (Oxford and Cambridge, 1992), p. 194.

and its possible redemption through nonidentity. I discuss Kant's categories because they still appear—to many aestheticians, artists, and philosophers—as authoritative and timeless, and as grounded in transcendent reason. In order to perceive the historical experience that mediates and structures these aesthetic categories, this illusion of ahistorical transcendence must be shattered. As we come to know the ghostly afterlife of Kantian concepts, and the historical contexts that define modern experience, we will realize that philosophy must become aware of its own entanglement in historical materiality, and that art must reflect upon its implicit historical experience, if both practices are to dialectically present the truth and untruth of society and subjectivity. Hence Adorno attends to Kant not in order to resolve the "aporia" of the third *Critique* (as if problems might be identified and torn away from their historical and social context); rather, he aims to do justice to the way in which Kantian categories both gather and dissolve meaning over time.[41] The categories' accrual and dissolution of meaning entails that their traditional names no longer apply to the experiences that correspond to them.

> Peter Uwe Hohendahl claims that
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> [f]or Adorno, the essential Kant is articulated in the First Critique. When it comes to aesthetic theory, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is recognized as an important text, but ultimately not as important as Hegel's aesthetics. In other words, for Adorno's own aesthetic theory the insights of Kant's First Critique turn out to be more valuable and demanding than Kant's discussion of the artwork. In the final analysis, Adorno fundamentally disagrees with Kant's approach to art, which means that he can make only selective use of Kant's Third Critique.[42]

The problems with Hohendahl's analysis are threefold. First, Hohendahl underestimates Adorno's subtle and dialectical engagement with Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. We can see Hegel's presence in Adorno's philosophy in several distinct moments: in Adorno's hope that metaphysical speculation is possible; in his principle that the object expresses

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[41] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 194.
[42] Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 35.

processes that constitute the subject; and in his method of immanent, as opposed to transcendent, critique. However, Adorno's aesthetic categories, and the arguments delicately woven around them, are profoundly indebted to Kant—in ways that are often not immediately apparent or obvious. Adorno's relation to tradition is determined by his ongoing reflection on the historical sedimentation that grounds experience. Thus, Adorno's critique of Kant often occurs beneath the surface of his more explicit, exaggerated pronouncements or aphorisms. Second, Hohendahl assumes that Adorno cannot employ Kant's aesthetics because he "fundamentally disagrees" with Kantian systematic philosophy.[43] Hohendahl overlooks the fact that Adorno often engages with, and integrates into his writing, precisely those thinkers and artists with whom he violently disagrees—such is, after all, the nature of dialectical critique. Third, Hohendahl assumes, wrongly, that the first *Critique* is the ground for the third *Critique*—as if Kant's thought proceeds in a linear or progressive fashion. On the contrary: from Adorno's perspective, the *Critique of Judgment* repeats regressive tendencies that drive the *Critique of Pure Reason* but which are never made explicit. This is why Enlightenment cognition is mythical. Thus it is in the third *Critique*, and not the first, that we become aware of Kant's unspoken historical ground.

Adorno maintains: "What needs to be carried through is what in the theories of Kant and Hegel await redemption through second reflection. Terminating the tradition of philosophical aesthetics must amount to giving it its due."[44] Hope lies in the metamorphosis of the old into the new. The termination of the aesthetic tradition is not a violent gesture because the tradition has become ideological: Kantian aesthetic categories left untransformed are no longer normative for aesthetic experience. On the other hand, Kantian and Hegelian concepts may also be redeemed if they are critically reflected upon. That is, traditional concepts carry a certain potential that allows them to express modern experience if they are transformed through philosophical reflection. This transformation affects the meaning and significance that such concepts take in experience itself. In this thesis I seek to reflect on those concepts in Kant's third *Critique* that require investigation—concepts that must be negated in their traditional form if they are to take

[43] Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise…*, pp. 35, 51.
[44] AT p. 435.

on animated and objective significance in late capitalist modernity. Hence what I propose is to critically rescue Kantian concepts through reflecting upon their appearance in Adorno's aesthetics. In order to put to rest the traditional account of aesthetic experience, that account must be thoroughly interrogated. Through interrogation and critical examination, the traditional concepts may present truth content to the subject; in this way, they are redeemed, and become new.

I focus on aesthetic experience because I believe that it may provide the most robust source of critique in modern society—one that allows subjects to experience, to imagine, and to reflect without coercive social influence.[45] I focus on Kant's third *Critique* because certain commentators under-estimate Kant's influence on Adorno, and also because I find that some of the current literature on the relation between Adorno and Kant provides a misleading account of their relationship.[46] For instance, some scholars assume that Adorno's main aesthetic debt is to Hegelian philosophy or Marxism, due to his use of the dialectical method, determinate negation, or materialist analysis; I seek to demonstrate that Adorno's turn towards aesthetics is also a turn back towards Kant, in order to critically examine his work.[47] Hegel, Marx, Lukács, and Benjamin contributed

[45] As Bernstein explains, the reason why art (and not philosophy) embodies the power of critical and emancipatory resistance is because, in modernity, only the former may negate and expose instrumental reason: "Art critically and categorially interrupts identity thinking. Philosophy, which possesses that capacity for interruption only weakly and derivatively, needs art for the sake of its claims to non-identity, as art needs philosophy in order to elaborate what it alone can accomplish...philosophy in its autonomous mode...has ended." Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 244. See also Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida* (Cambridge and London, 1998).

[46] Martin Jay, *Adorno*, (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 118, 132; Wellmer, 'Adorno, Modernity…', and Wilhelm S. Wurzer, 'Kantian Snapshot of Adorno: Modernity Standing Still', in Max Pensky (ed*), The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the* Postmodern, (Albany, 1997).

[47] Mauro Bozzetti, 'Hegel on Trial: Adorno's Critique of Philosophical Systems', in Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (eds), *Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Massachusetts and Oxford, 2002).

immeasurably to Adorno's metaphysics, his theories of society and history, and his dialectical method; Kant, however, remains the ground of Adorno's aesthetic thought.[48]

My argument thus opposes various commentators, who claim that a) Adorno does not move beyond problems in Kant's philosophy (such as the concept of rationality);[49] b) Adorno's conception of philosophical reflection is problematic and ill-conceived, and should be rejected;[50] c) Adorno does, and should, allow reason priority in aesthetic experience;[51] d) Adorno fails to properly reconcile philosophy and aesthetic experience, and hence critical reflection cannot fulfill the task that Adorno assigns to it (namely, to negate social untruth, and to indicate utopian possibilities embodied in art's semblance);[52] e) Adorno's engagement with Kant is destructive rather than productive;[53] f) Kant's concept of aesthetic pleasure may be rescued; it is a way of reviving repressed aspects of experience, through which the subject relates to otherness;[54] and g) Adorno's engagement with Kant is focused on the sublime (rather than the beautiful), and Adorno inherits solutions, and not problems, from Kant.[55]

Another commentator, Raymond Geuss, argues that Adorno retains certain central elements of Kant's aesthetics, namely his "commitment" to autonomy and to formalism.[56] Yet this account is too schematic. Geuss fails to detail the central differences between

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[48] Thanks to Nick Lawrence for making this clear to me.

[49] Ute Guzzoni, 'Hegel's Untruth: Some Remarks on Adorno's critique of Hegel', in Simon Jaris (ed), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory Volume I* (4 vols, London and New York, 2007).

[50] Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'The Ephemeral and the Absolute: Provisional Notes to Adorno's Aesthetic Theory', in Gerhard Richter (ed), *Language Without Soil: Adorno and Late Philosophical Modernity* (New York, 2010).

[51] Morton Schoolman, 'Avoiding "Embarrassment": Aesthetic Reason and Aporetic Critique in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*', *Polity* 37:3 (July, 2005), pp. 335-364.

[52] Rudiger Bubner, 'Can Theory Become Aesthetic? On a Principle Theme of Adorno's Philosophy', in Simon Jarvis (ed), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory Volume I* (4 vols, London and New York, 2007).

[53] Thomas Huhn, 'The Kantian Sublime and the Nostalgia for Violence', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (Summer, 1995), pp. 269-275.

[54] Cascardi, 'The Consequences of…'.

[55] Hohendahl, 'Nature and the Autonomy…', pp. 247-257.

[56] Geuss, 'Art and Criticism…', p. 311.

Kant's and Adorno's concepts of autonomy, which we can only sketch here: for Kant, autonomy names the result of the subject's spontaneity, and produces aesthetic judgment that aims to cleanse itself of material interest and sensuousness; for Adorno, autonomy is an aspect of the artwork that is subject to erosion as the work integrates historical and social material into itself. Further, Adorno argues that autonomy resists erosion through the work's practice of determinate negation, or its capacity to critique social practices according to their own contradictions. In authentic works, immanent critique transforms social practices into aesthetic elements in the artwork. Moreover, Geuss's assumption that Adorno is a formalist in the Kantian tradition reveals itself to be false when we realize that the artwork always dialectically weaves form and content: neither has relevance or significance without the other.

My aim in the thesis is to explore three main arguments. First, the logic behind Adorno's argument that art requires philosophy, and that philosophy requires art, often appears obscure. I propose that historical experience provides the ground for Adorno's proposition. Thus, I contend that historical experience, rather than epistemological or aesthetic considerations, lies at the forefront of Adorno's reflections on art and culture. Second, I analyze Adorno's concept of interpretation as a variety of metaphysical experience, thus resisting the dominant reading of it as a method of unlocking the artwork's secrets, or as a subjective mode of comportment toward a passive and yielding object. The concept of interpretation must be considered as a way of gaining proximity to historical, social, and material experience—rather than a method of determining the artwork. Finally, I argue that many of the concepts in *Aesthetic Theory* owe their existence to Adorno's struggle with Kantian categories. In this way I show precisely how the philosophical tradition appears in Adorno's work, and I trace how Kant has influenced Adorno's aesthetic thought, which had been unfairly neglected in secondary scholarship. I also show indirectly why Kant's categories must be negated and transformed in order to correspond to modern aesthetic experience and aesthetic objects.

Now, let me put to rest various concerns about comparing the aesthetic categories of Adorno and Kant—who may appear to be wholly different philosophical animals. One might wonder how two philosophers who differ so substantially could be discussed at all in the same paragraph, never mind in the same thesis. Over 175 years separates the

publication of the *Critique of Judgment* from *Aesthetic Theory*. Kant practices transcendental idealism, which relies on reason to produce universally valid judgment; Adorno practices a version of dialectical materialism, which criticizes rationality for distorting nature's particularity in the name of universally valid knowledge.[57] How could we possibly decide that one philosopher has a better perspective than the other? Aren't they simply espousing different conceptions of the world that are irreconcilable?

As it happens, Adorno and Kant are both working with the same material, and with mostly the same problems, and both are part of a single tradition. However, Adorno and Kant employ different methods because their historical situations are radically distinct. Kant argues that the freedom of subjectivity is vital because the French Revolution illuminated the possibilities of human autonomy and independence from mere nature or social convention. Adorno argues that aesthetics must dialectically mediate subject and object, because the traditional Enlightenment project lay in ruins by the mid-twentieth century; however, Adorno maintains that Kant's work may be redeemed through re-orienting traditional problems in a new light. For instance, regarding one of the central paradoxes in the *Critique of Judgment*, Adorno remarks: "Kant envisioned a subjectively mediated but objective aesthetics. The Kantian concept of the judgment of taste, by its subjectively directed query, concerns the core of objective aesthetics: the question of quality—good and bad, true and false—in the artwork."[58] In this manner the judgment of taste, which ostensibly measures subjective pleasure or displeasure, may be redefined as the capacity to perceive truth or falsity in the aesthetic object. Kant and Adorno both accept that reason is the most critical faculty in the subject; however, Adorno argues that reason is guilty of terrible crimes against nature, whereas Kant, partially because of his historical perspective, has faith that reason is able to heal all the

[57] Owen Hulatt gives a lucid account of Adorno's complex arguments that ground his concept of truth: "For Kant, concepts were autonomous, by which I mean that they followed their own internal principles. For Adorno, by contrast, concepts are 'tools' that work in service of an extraconceptual project—namely, the project of mastering and manipulating the individual's environment. The form and use of concepts are *heteronomously* and instrumentally determined by the needs of self-preservation". See Owen Hulatt, *Adorno's Theory of Philosophical and Aesthetic Truth* (New York, 2016), p. 8.
[58] AT p. 216.

wounds that it has inflicted. Adorno, emerging from the ruined tradition of German Enlightenment philosophy, perceives that the tradition cannot be restored to its original state (or rather, the ideal state that never arrived); nevertheless, the problems defined by that tradition have not disappeared. As a result, they must be re-articulated using different vocabulary, and according to distinct criteria.

For instance, Kant's description of the sublime might be formulated as a question: How is the subject to cognize experience that is incommensurate with all of her categories (which she assumed were universally valid)? Adorno's answer might be something like the following: The subject must recognize that her cognition functions as a means of controlling the object, and is not merely a neutral process of cognition; thus, the experience of incommensurability might indicate to the subject that the object cannot be captured or appropriated without violence—violence that is turned against the subject in the experience of the sublime (or the shudder), when the object displays its own power of constitution. Adorno describes the truth content of the Kantian sublime as its presentation of the subject's capacity to resist nature or convention through spirit (freedom).[59] The dark side of this capacity, however, is that it very easily descends into the domination of subjectivity over objectivity. For this reason Kant's definition of freedom ought to be amended to reflect the subject's self-knowledge that nature is part of her self.

Or, to take another example, Kant might describe his own ideal of disinterested contemplation as the ideal state of cognition without prejudice, and without undue influence from external processes that might contaminate autonomous judgment. Adorno might respond that, while cognition without prejudice is an admirable goal, it is impossible to realize without doing harm to the subject's own internal processes (such as unconscious desires, wishes, biases, or natural inclinations that have hardened into convention). While these processes should not guide reflective thought, they must be engaged with rather than dismissed, because they constitute part of the subject's

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[59] In his lectures on Aesthetics, Adorno remarks: "…it is an objective part of all beauty that we feel the happiness of beauty wherever we feel that, through the purpose of the spirit—even if we stay within a picture, within the realm of semblances—we are free, and stronger than the context of mere nature in which we are otherwise embedded." See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics: 1958/59* (Cambridge and Medford, 2018), p. 29.

history—and the social context that forms subjectivity—and thus must be brought into the open in order to be philosophically examined. If Kantian interest is defined as natural influence or desire, and disinterest names the ideal of autonomy, then Adorno's critique of Kant becomes clearer: "If the case of natural beauty were pending, dignity would be found culpable for having raised the human animal above the animal."[60] Thus Adorno reconfigures Kant's concept of disinterest—which harms nature in the name of autonomous subjectivity—into the concept of natural beauty, which names the experience of contradiction (or nonidentity) between subject and object, and thus brings the subject to awareness of the object's painful history of domination by subjectivity. This transformation is necessary because traditional categories are no longer self-evident or normative—they cannot guide subjectivity because they are part of the ideological collusion that harms objectivity. If the subject continues to uncritically employ concepts that perpetuate violence, she will continue to harm nature (both her own and that of objects); as a result, experience will become more abstract and lifeless. In the first line of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno declares: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the whole, not even its right to exist."[61] This loss is caused by the fact that art, for Adorno, is inextricably bound up with rationality, which has been driven by the desire to preserve the self (rather than other goals such as the Aristotelian desire for knowledge or virtue).[62] The desire for self-preservation, in turn, has damaged the subject's capacity for autonomy, freedom, judgment, and reason—precisely those categories that Kant assumes will procure enlightened moral action for as long as humans exercise rationality. Thus the subject must reflect on her historical experience: for instance, she must examine how self-preservation appears across time, and become aware of nature's expression of suffering, which appears mostly clearly in modern art. In his essay on Alban Berg, Adorno remarks: "However, at every one of its stages music suffers a loss at the hands of progress: the

[60] AT, p. 82.
[61] AT, p. 1.
[62] Art, however, must also express the materiality that grounds reason, as Adorno says in his *Aesthetics* lectures: "Art, then, cannot simply be subsumed under the concepts of reason or rationality but is, rather, this rationality itself, only in the form of its otherness, in the form—if you will—of a particular resistance against it." See Adorno, *Aesthetics*, p. 9.

increasing control of its material, the expression of the increasing manipulation of nature, always entails a certain violence."[63] For this reason, historical experience becomes an index of self-awareness, critical philosophical thought, and aesthetic receptivity.

Thus those concepts that, in Kant, served to cover over the manipulative work of Enlightenment reason are rearranged, in Adorno, to reveal the power that circulates in apparently innocuous aesthetic categories. Adorno emphasizes that natural beauty has been formed by history: "But perhaps the most profound force of resistance stored in the cultural landscape is the expression of history that is compelling, aesthetically, because it is etched by the real suffering of the past."[64] This brings us back to the overarching narrative of the thesis: that art and philosophy require each other so that historical experience may attain awareness of itself, and may express suffering. Aesthetic and philosophical categories are validated and invalidated by history; we only discover their truth or falsity by measuring what they claim to be against what they actually are (according to their historical context), and by evaluating the historical experience that inheres within them. Thus Adorno tries to excavate the historical content of Kant's categories in order to enable those categories to speak of their own experiences, and to immanently critique their own activity. As the sublime metamorphoses into the shudder, for instance, the category becomes aware of its own historical sediment; this awareness leads it to negate its traditional form, in order to articulate new content. In this manner tradition achieves a measure of redemption.

Is Adorno himself affected by this dialectic? Will his categories transform themselves in the future in order to articulate experiences of which we, at the present, are unaware? Undoubtedly—no-one escapes history. But we cannot speculate on how experience will develop or regress. For the moment we must retain Adorno's framework, because our experience remains that of a late modern subject: experience has been emptied of materiality, because objectivity is repressed by subjectivity. This is the same antinomy that occupies Kant in the Introduction to the third *Critique*. Kant asks: How might freedom become concrete? And, How can mere concretion attain universality? Adorno even uses Kantian language in order to diagnose social ills, as this passage from

[63] Adorno, *Can One Live…*, p. 365.
[64] AT p. 85.

Minima Moralia makes clear: "For tenderness between people is nothing other than awareness of the possibility of relations without purpose, a solace still glimpsed by those embroiled in purposes; a legacy of old privileges promising a privilege-free condition."[65] Adorno suggests that the utopian condition of purposiveness without purpose, or non-instrumental thought and action, can only be negatively defined as the "awareness of the possibility" of human relationships that have not been corralled or distorted to serve an end that is external to the intrinsic value of those relationships themselves.[66] In other words, consciousness of the lack of actuality is the only image of utopia that we may aspire to.

An Outline of the Chapters

Now I will briefly give a roadmap or an outline of the chapters, and the logic that binds them together.

Chapter One argues that the category of disinterested contemplation in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* contributes to the repression of materiality, and nature, that produces the restricted, instrumental rationality that structures modern experience. I begin the thesis with this category in particular because it is among the most subject-oriented in all of Kant's aesthetics. I also argue that Adorno's category of natural beauty responds to the above Kantian category, but that disinterested contemplation ought to be reconfigured so that it may become radical and critical. In this way I argue that, when philosophy attends carefully to aesthetic experience, it also attends to the layers of tradition within such experience; and, that aesthetic experience (in this case, Kant's) requires reflection on its own material conditions (history and nature) if it is to remain adequate to modern experience.

In Chapter Two, I argue that the Kantian sublime contains a redemptive moment within it—specifically poetic perception—that expresses a different manner of relating to nature. In addition, I claim that Adorno's concept of the shudder, which responds to the sublime, may be considered Adorno's concept of naturalized spontaneity—that is, nonviolent spontaneity that does not harm subjectivity or objectivity.

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[65] MM, p. 41.
[66] MM, p. 41.

In Chapter Three, we will see that Adorno reconfigures the category of the genius into the concepts of expression and mimesis. Mimesis, while a necessary category, has its limitations: namely, it is unclear how it remains critical as well as emancipatory. Chapters Two and Three demonstrate that materiality is necessary for experience, and that philosophical reflection on artworks results in historical experience. For instance, Adorno's reflection on Kant's implicit theory of freedom expressed in the sublime results in his transformed concept of the shudder, which demonstrates why we require a new concept of freedom in late capitalist, or industrial, modernity.

In Chapter Four, we will explore Adorno's concept of interpretation. This chapter argues that interpretation grapples with one of the most difficult problems in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*: how art and philosophy relate to, and depend on, each other. I will argue that philosophy requires art because philosophy, if it is not to become abstracted from nature and materiality, requires history; and, that art requires philosophy in order to radicalize its own fossilized historical content, and to transform it into potentiality. Interpretation must be conceived of as a form of metaphysical experience, which is itself grounded in history, if interpretation is to relinquish its conventional definition as mere reflective judgment.

In Chapter Five, I turn to Max Ernst's *Natural History* series, and Surrealism as a philosophical, political, and artistic current. We will see that Ernst's techniques of frottage and grattage implicitly critique Adorno's concept of technique as wholly rational, and that Surrealism also negates Critical Theory's emphasis on reason as the only faculty capable of structuring aesthetic experience. Conversely, Critical Theory critically engages with Surrealism's occasional abstract negation of history and material suffering. Thus this chapter contributes to the main argument that philosophy reaches history through art, and that art's historical expression becomes radical through philosophical reflection. In other words: both extremes are required if experience is to be dialectical.

Objections and Replies

Now, consider an objection to my main argument. One might respond that to entangle, or confuse, philosophical reflection and historical experience is dangerous, because philosophy requires independence and autonomy from its object (for instance, society,

history, nature, art) if it is to remain critical and properly reflective. If philosophy's validity remains conditional, one might object, then it is not actually philosophical reflection at all, because such reflection requires distance from its object if it is to remain neutral, and if philosophy is to retain its capacity to calmly assess, rather than to be overtaken by, reality. While I have sympathy with this objection—because philosophy must remain some distance from society in order not to become another commodity, or another functional instrument of pleasure or monetary gain—I think that it fails to consider how the relationship between subject and object ought to be modeled. Subjects should not consider themselves to actively constitute objects; rather, we must acknowledge that nature and reason, and history and reason, co-constitute one other. Further, those philosophers who assumed that they were neutrally assessing reality often turn out to be, on the contrary, guilty of violently deforming its most intricate features. Descartes and Bacon are among the most culpable in this respect. As we will see, Adorno's practice of historical negation is a method of reflective evaluation that remains within the circle of the object, so to speak, while also critically engaging with it. Finally, without historical experience, philosophical reflection remains empty and abstract from its end—namely, to critically reflect upon individual experience, to investigate and advance natural-historical life, and to reflect upon the unrealized possibilities within history. If history composes the subject's experience, it must also compose the subject's reflection on her experience, because reason is intertwined with the other faculties. When reason becomes reified, the destruction of experience begins.

Let me answer another possible objection to my main argument. One might argue that I am trying to redeem or 'cannibalize' any and all traditional or conventional material—and therefore am constructing a positive and teleological model of historical development. On the contrary: I am not arguing that every aspect of the past can and should be transformed into a new form. There are some ideas that cannot be redeemed—such as Francis Bacon's implicit assumption that nature exists only to serve human ends.[67] In addition, even after traditional ideas have been dialectically transformed, it

[67] André Krebber, 'Anthropocentrism and Reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: Environmental Crisis and Animal Subject', *Anthropocentrism*, in *Human-Animal Studies* (2011), p. 330: "Enlightened perception ossified the manifoldness or multiplicity of the

does not guarantee philosophical, artistic, cognitive, or moral progress. That would be an unjustifiably Idealist principle. Rather, we can only transform those ideas that adequately fit into modern experience and historical-social reality. Adorno's concepts do not progress or advance our knowledge compared to Kant's concepts; rather, the former concepts align more closely with the reality of modern society, and the damaged individual's life, than the latter concepts are able to, due to historical suffering.

One might also wonder why I focus on the Holocaust as opposed to other crimes that might appear equally catastrophic, and which have arguably also affected modern consciousness. For instance, the massacres of Native Americans by Europeans in the 17th Century, or the horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, or the First World War, or the contemporary ecological catastrophe, in which countless animals are becoming extinct, are all wholly unethical and horrific. It is true that there are many heinous crimes that demonstrate subjectivity's degeneration due to its extreme rationalism. In this thesis I focus on the Holocaust because it provides the most extreme evidence in the twentieth century of the twisted and regressive manifestation of reason's barbaric comportment. In addition, due to space, I cannot analyze all of the massacres that resulted from modern instrumental logic. The Holocaust, in brief, resulted from Enlightenment methods and rational procedures—not from the animal instincts in humankind, but rather from our highly developed and refined capacity to analyze and compartmentalize nature. Zygmunt Bauman argues: "The most shattering of lessons deriving from the analysis of the 'twisted road to Auschwitz' is that—in the last resort—*the choice of physical extermination as the right means to the task of Entfernung was a product of routine bureaucratic procedures*: means-ends calculus, budget balancing, universal rule application."[68]

The Holocaust was not a deviation from the Enlightened, scientific quest to seek out the most efficient method of categorizing nature—and to crush apparently irrational

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world and the differences of objects in a complementary dichotomy of humans versus nature that turned nature into 'mere objectivity'." Krebber continues: "The 'rabbit suffering the torment of the laboratory is seen not as a representative [of its species] but, mistakenly, as a mere example.' It is not recognised as an individual that shares certain commonalities with other individuals of its species, but only consists of the commonalities of its species. *This* rabbit is stripped of its individuality."

[68] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge and Oxford: 1989), p. 17.

mythology. Rather, those principles that resulted from the Enlightenment, and which Kant often extolls, such as equality, universal rationality, the progressive mastery of nature, disinterested contemplation, disenchanted scientific systematization, and the fraternity of humankind, contributed directly to the brutal violence that was the Holocaust. Bauman argues: "At no point of its long and tortuous execution did the Holocaust come into conflict with the principles of rationality. The 'Final Solution' did not clash at any stage with the rational pursuit of efficient, optimal goal-implementation. On the contrary, *it arose out of a genuinely rational concern, and it was generated by bureaucracy true to its form and purpose*."[69] Bauman goes on to remark that there are many "massacres…[and] mass murders" that have been committed without "modern bureaucracy" or the scientific reason characteristic of the Enlightenment.[70] However, he continues, "[t]he Holocaust…was clearly unthinkable without such bureaucracy. The Holocaust was not an irrational outflow of the not-yet-fully-eradicated residues of pre-modern barbarity."[71] On the contrary: it resulted from those rational procedures and methods that developed in the Enlightenment period and that characterize modern scientific method, and which Kant employs throughout his transcendental idealism.[72] The Holocaust, for Bauman, is a thoroughly *modern* phenomenon.[73] We can now see more clearly why Adorno calls for a full investigation into the irrationality of reason itself, and why Kant's transcendental philosophy—and its principles of universality and necessity—should not be considered normative for modern aesthetics.

Finally, some Kant scholars will accuse Adorno of doing harm to the immutable concepts and structures that compose Kantian aesthetics. First, such a charge underestimates the strength of Kant's original categories. In addition, Adorno's dialectical method, which he inherits from Hegel, does not throw away the negated patterns of knowing; instead, they are employed to attain a higher, more accurate, concept

[69] Bauman, *Modernity*…, p. 17.
[70] Bauman, *Modernity*…, p. 17.
[71] Bauman, *Modernity*…, p. 17.
[72] Bauman, *Modernity*…, p. 17.
[73] Bauman, *Modernity*…, p. 17.

of truth.[74] More importantly, every philosopher's work contains tendencies that may remain latent or unconscious, but which have the power to be reinvented, or to reappear in a new form, at a later historical period. To deny this is to forget not only that ideas are shaped by history, but also that certain ideas only come into their own because of a certain historical necessity, and that ideas may be disproven by the demands of the future—in addition to the past. To this extent, no philosopher may fully unravel the potentialities of their own work; that task falls to later scholars. Thus the future is implicitly, and negatively, present in every work of philosophy and art—even the most traditional. Adorno reflects, in his *Aesthetics* lectures, that

> …the most staggering thing about Kantian philosophy—if one is truly able to read it as expression, not merely as epistemology—is how, with Kant in particular, the power of the idea itself always extends, almost independently of the contingent nature of his person and even his specific experience, to all sorts of things which, if you will, he did not actually 'know' in that sense—in other words, how far Kant's knowledge actually extended beyond his own knowledge. That, one could say, is virtually the proof of Kant's genius….[75]

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[74] Michael Forster, 'Hegel's Dialectical Method', in Frederick Beiser (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 137. Forster describes the Hegelian ascension to a transcendent standpoint with the metaphor of climbing a ladder (137). Each non-Hegelian viewpoint (that is, each pattern of knowledge that contains contradictions that require resolution) is a rung on a ladder (137). The ladder may be ascended only through going through all of the different patterns of knowledge until the last pattern is reached, which does not contain any contradictions (137). Forster calls this "the stable, self-consistent viewpoint of the Hegelian system" (137).

[75] Adorno, *Aesthetics*, p. 16.

Chapter One: Kant's Disinterested Contemplation and Adorno's Natural Beauty

Section One: Kantian Disinterested Contemplation

In this chapter I argue that Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation is inadequate because it is unable to express the historical suffering of nature, and because it represses the object's materiality (Section One). I also argue that Adorno's concept of natural beauty ought to be considered a response to Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation, and, finally, that Adorno must ground the aesthetic concept of natural beauty in a concept of temporality (Section Two). Such temporality would be a mode of aesthetic experience that allows natural beauty to both critically reflect on the past—on the suffering and violence that historical experience expresses—and also to anticipate a future in which such suffering and violence do not exist, and in which difference is embraced rather than erased or transcended in an abstract manner. The repression of nature results in a forgetting of the past; it is an attempt to cover over the subject's historical ground. Repression of desire results in a forgetting of the future: the subject is unable to imagine another world, and utopian longing is silenced.

I call the new form of temporality that would engage properly with past and future *metamorphic*. This latter temporality appears in those objects of natural beauty that both call forth the suffering of history while also indicating, negatively, the promise of embracing nonidentity. Thus it allows the object to both embody the contradictions of the past through remembrance while also becoming other than itself and indicating, negatively, another, unknown future, that remains a placeholder for possibility and potentiality. Metamorphic time thus involves recollection and speculation that dialectically refer to each other. Such temporality challenges the subject to viscerally experience historical suffering, and also to imagine that another, future, society may overcome the contradictions that produce that suffering. When nonidentity is embraced rather than excluded, the subject's experience becomes a field of tension between the past and the future—or materiality and possibility. The dynamic tension of metamorphic temporality is necessary to critique, and move beyond, the abstract and static nature of disinterested contemplation, as Kant conceives of it, and to suggest another mode of experiencing natural beauty—one that is responsive to the experience of modernity.

I begin with Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation because it anticipates several other issues that I will discuss in later chapters: the question of the relation of nature and freedom; the repression of nature in aesthetic theory, and in the subject's experience generally; the question of whether aesthetic experience is static or dynamic; the relation of subject to object in aesthetic experience; and the precise nature of the queer tension that characterizes the aesthetic object. The chapter proceeds in several steps: first, I discuss Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation, and the various reasons why it is not a valid aesthetic category in modernity; second, I discuss Adorno's concept of natural beauty, and the reasons why Adorno's aesthetics requires a theory of time; third, I discuss the theory of metamorphic time itself.

Kantian Disinterested Contemplation

Kant argues that disinterested contemplation is necessary in order to ground aesthetic judgment's autonomy and purity, which occurs through the exclusion of sensation and desire. The exclusion of sensation and desire ensures that aesthetic judgment retains its strictly transcendental nature, which is based in the conditions of possibility for experience rather than empirical factors that would compromise such judgment's autonomy. While disinterested contemplation may never be conclusively identified through introspection—since, according to some commentators, it remains a regulative idea rather than a constitutive mental state—it nevertheless foregrounds the ideal of a judgment that is stripped of materiality, that grounds itself in the present rather than the past or the future, and that only acknowledges the object to the extent that the latter reflects the subject's abstract categories, which Kant argues are universal and necessary.

Kant maintains that disinterested contemplation is a regulative ideal in which morality, sensation, and desire are absent from aesthetic judgment. This is necessary, according to Kant, because aesthetic judgment cannot be dependent upon concepts (such as good or evil) or sensation (that is, materiality that could influence the subject's will). Disinterested contemplation instead grounds itself in the subject's judgment that has been cleansed of contaminating interests; this procedure ensures that she will be uncorrupted by external influences that might otherwise prejudice her. Interest is associated with fluidity, becoming, the threatening heteronomy of nature and sensation, and the

breakdown of autonomous, unified and rational experience. For Kant, aesthetic judgment must be a priori—that is, grounded in the subject's faculties (imagination and understanding) rather than the object's fluctuating and transient nature. Kant, with his principle of disinterested contemplation, hopes to exclude materiality (that is, natural instinct, historical experience, and imaginative desire) and well as rationality (moral judgment and theoretical philosophical reflection) from aesthetic judgment, in order to insist upon its a priori nature—its freedom from external ends of any kind. Yet this procedure contradicts Kant's other aim in the third *Critique*: to allow the subject transparent self-knowledge about her own nature, goals, hopes, and purposes, and to allow her the freedom to reflect upon, and transform, those hopes and purposes.

Disinterested contemplation thus indirectly represses nature and history—or the subject's memory of past suffering—as well as desire, which may motivate her, if mediated through philosophical reflection, to imagine a future in which subjects are capable of embracing difference or otherness, rather than fleeing it. In this way, disinterested contemplation attempts to erase both the past and the future from experience, and to preserve an eternal present that forces the subject to adopt a static and unchanging identity. The past, which appears to the subject as memory, acts to remind the subject of her nonidentity with her ideal self (for Kant, a unified totality which legislates to materiality or nature); further, the future appears to the subject through her desire, which presents an image of otherness mediated by materiality and reflection. When past and future are repressed in experience, the subject is forced to adopt a coercive stance towards her own internal composition—those needs, desires, memories, and hopes that constitute her capacity to experience and reflect must be placed under erasure.

The result of this erasure in experience, effected by disinterested contemplation, is that the subject's self-knowledge is compromised: if materiality cannot express itself, and if imaginative desire is cancelled, then the subject is unable to critically reflect upon her own experience. Moreover, she is unable to use that experience—specifically, knowledge of her own ideological inheritance, the memory of suffering that she has been taught to repress, and the desires that would provide an image of otherness—to construct a new relationship to materiality, history, and society. The subject may only overcome the

instrumentality of reason if she develops a new relationship with the past. We may define instrumental reason as the irrational use of reason as a tool that blindly posits, and achieves, certain arbitrary ends without actively reflecting upon the meaning (moral, philosophical, or aesthetic) of those ends, and the consequences that may attend them. In addition, the subject may only relate to the future if she does not repress, or forget, that her experience is irreducibly material; and that her desire for otherness may only be truly free if she is unafraid to reflect upon her own natural history—that is, the dialectical intertwining of reason and suffering that forms her complex experience.

Kant's ideal of disinterested contemplation demonstrates that he wishes to construct an aesthetic subject that is isolated from materiality and from speculation—that is, from historical and natural experience, from philosophical reflection, and imaginative longing. Kant's goal is to allow the subject to feel the pleasure that results from her faculties' balanced interaction in reflective judgment: the free play between imagination and understanding.[76] Such play forces the subject to attend to her own faculties, while excluding the object, and the layers of sedimentation that compose it.[77] As a result of free play, the subject herself is in danger of becoming alienated from her own historical and natural composition. If the object is stripped of materiality, then the former will remain a mere signifier that does not express its actual content (historical and natural experience); if the subject forgets that her reason is grounded in material conditions, then she will risk mistaking the formal and abstract signifiers of experience (for instance, the subject's feeling of pleasure, or the play of imagination and understanding, or aesthetic ideas, discussed later in the thesis) for concrete, rich, and complex experience itself, which follows the object's contours, and which refuses any final or totalizing synthesis. For Adorno, the synthetic result, as an undifferentiated totality, always remains abstract from the concrete and diverse particularity that it unifies, because any synthesis represses difference in order to attain identity, and because the divergent nature of that which is

[76] CJ, Section 9, Ak. 217-218, p. 62.
[77] CJ, Section 9, Ak. 218, p. 63: "…apart from a reference to the subject's feeling, beauty is nothing by itself."

collected together is necessarily erased.[78] The goal of the synthetic procedure—unity rather than multiplicity—implicitly elides diverse particularity in favor of a unified totality.

For Kant, aesthetic feeling is purely subjective; it is not dependent on any feature or quality that the object presents.[79] The subjectivity of aesthetic feeling confirms the autonomy of aesthetic judgment for Kant, but it also, according to Adorno, condemns such judgment as empty, abstract, and formal. Aesthetic judgment that is guided by the object immerses itself in historical and material experience; thus, it has a crucial advantage over judgment that remains merely subjective: the former variety of aesthetic judgment does not repress the object's materiality, and so does justice to the materiality within the subject as well. Thus judgment that is attentive to the object demonstrates how a non-repressive, nonviolent, and utopian relationship between subject and object might unfold. Instead of mirroring the coercive relationship of determination between subject and object that characterizes Kantian determinative judgment, in which the object only attains value for epistemic cognition when it conforms to the subject's empirical concepts and her logical categories, in mimetic aesthetic judgment, the object presents its features to the passive yet critical subject, who follows the materiality in the object without seeking to define it in the terms given by forms, concepts, and categories.

For Kant, sensation involves empirical and material content, which the object imparts to the subject. Feeling is purely subjective; it arises when the subject's faculties—imagination and understanding—freely play with each other. Thus feeling is not dependent on empirical causality; it is caused by the subject's own faculties. Although an empirical object may occasion the judgment of taste, aesthetic judgment itself is independent of the sensation given directly by the object, because such judgment necessarily relates to aesthetic feeling, not sensation, which must be mediated if it is to become objective. Kant divorces subjective feeling from empirical content in order to preserve the a priori (universal and necessary) nature of the judgment of taste. From Kant's perspective, such an a priori ground preserves the subject's legislative validity,

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[78] Jay Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge: Adorno in Beckett', in David Wood (ed), *Philosophers' Poets* (London and New York, 1990), p. 180. See also Adorno, *Kant's* Critique…, p. 196.
[79] CJ, Section 9, Ak. 218, p. 62.

and ensures that the judgment of taste avoids degenerating into mere contingency, which would void aesthetic judgment as mere personal opinion. However, in modernity, which is characterized by instrumental rationality, it is dangerous to evacuate materiality from experience entirely in order to preserve the subject's law-giving capacity—and to ensure that the object remains a passive and willing recipient of subjective laws, principles, and categories. Such a strict divide between the capacities of the subject and that of the object lends itself to excluding materiality from the subject entirely, and from denying that objects (construed broadly, as nature, the historical experience within subjectivity, artworks, non-human animal sensation and instinct, and the psychological unconscious) have agency and spontaneity.

Kant writes that "a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment whose determining basis *cannot be other* than *subjective*."[80] Kant excludes sensation from aesthetic judgment in order to retain the subject's authority to determine and mediate that sensation from an external standpoint. If the subject contains sensation or materiality within herself, from Kant's perspective, she would risk becoming determined or driven by that materiality rather than being able to direct or mediate it on her own terms. Of course, such spontaneous directionality that originates in materiality or objectivity, and which mediates the subject, is precisely what Adorno values, because it allows the subject to engage with difference or otherness without imposing her own logical categories upon it. Kant's transcendental idealism necessarily aims to uncover invariant, yet fundamentally static, structures in experience. This principle is problematic for Adorno because it disregards the social and historical forces that affect the subject's experience, and which circulate in apparently wholly subjective feeling and cognition.

In the third *Critique*, Kant defines interest as "the liking we connect with the presentation of an object's existence."[81] Liking involves desire, which originates in the subject's natural and historical sedimentation, and which is thus grounded in heteronomous objectivity rather than purely subjective feeling. Such desire, according to Kant, cannot be admitted into aesthetic judgment, because doing so would automatically

[80] CJ, Section 1, Ak. 204, p. 44.
[81] CJ, Section 2, Ak. 204, p. 45.

compromise the a priori status that such judgment must have if it is to be examined through transcendental critique. Disinterested contemplation must contain no reference to an object's empirical causality, which affects the subject contingently, through sensation; thus it excludes subjective inclinations, desires, fears, hopes, or any other psychological or somatic phenomena that could corrupt aesthetic autonomy. For Kant, a subject experiences interest either when sensations, given by an object, influence the subject (the agreeable), or when an object is connected with a purpose (or empirical concept, such as the morally good).[82] Judgments that involve subjective desire are called agreeable: "Hence such a liking always refers at once to our power of desire [reason], either as the basis that determines it, or at any rate as necessarily connected with that determining basis."[83] Note that Kant assumes that interest refers to reason—he denies that reason is itself composed of interests, desires, or sensations. Interest, then, remains separate from judgment, because the former dictates the subject's desires, and so is based on either concepts or sensations, but not feeling.

Now we can begin to see why disinterested contemplation remains inadequate for the modern subject's aesthetic experience. Kant's concept results in repression because it subtracts from experience those elements of the object that express desire, somatic experience, moral judgment, and historical and natural sedimentation.[84] Thus it results in a circumscribed picture of the object, because it only accepts those features of the object that accord or conform to the subject's experience. An object of natural beauty that triggered the subject's desire would not be allowed into aesthetic judgment, for Kant, because it would compromise the subject's capacity to feel the pleasure generated by her

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[82] CJ, Sections 3-4, Ak. 205-209, pp. 47-51.
[83] CJ, Section 2, Ak. 204, p. 45.
[84] For an alternative view of Adorno's relation to disinterested contemplation, see Tracey Stark's article. She remarks: "What Adorno finds most appealing about Kant's aesthetics is that it insists upon reflective judgment…in reflective judgment the universal arises out of the particulars. Art, when it gets to this universal moment, tells the truth about society." I disagree with Stark's assessment that Adorno agrees with the universalizing and totalizing nature of reflective judgment. Mimetic comportment, for Adorno, must retrieve the particularity in experience, instead of transcending such particularity through searching for universality. Further, reflective judgment remains idealistic because in the end it contributes to Kant's desire to construct a coherent philosophical system. See Tracey Stark, 'The Dignity of the Particular: Adorno on Kant's Aesthetics', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 24 (1998), pp. 61-83. See p. 62 for above quote.

faculties (imagination and understanding), and would thereby militate against the autonomy of aesthetic judgment. The object's natural and historical sedimentation would on Kant's account damage such judgment, because it introduces layers of content that do not originate within the subject's faculties, or her feeling. Thus such sedimentation is implicitly heterogeneous, and any empirical content introduced entails the contingency of aesthetic judgment, which undercuts its transcendental status. The transcendental requirement of aesthetic judgment entails that the aesthetic object—whether natural or artistic—cannot express its own layers of historical and natural experience, because doing so would have a deleterious effect on the subject's agency, which is unable to embrace empirical contingency without mediating it through a priori structures. The object that is unable to express its own layers of material content—and that cannot register historical experience, and the utopian desires that arise from such experience—is cut off from its own history, and from its grounding in empirical nature, which are both dismissed as merely contingent.

The subject is also damaged by disinterested contemplation, which elides the historical and natural elements within experience. Thus disinterested contemplation constructs a severely limited picture of the human subject. For instance, the subject's utopian desire for a future that would be radically other, which must arise from the untruth or ideology that characterizes the empirical world, has no place in aesthetic experience on Kant's account, because it necessarily proceeds from empirical rather than subjective experience. In addition, the memory of past suffering, which historical experience expresses, cannot enter into aesthetic judgment for Kant, because such history transgresses against the principle that only subjective feeling may motivate aesthetic judgment. Thus two crucial sources of modern art's critical and radical capacity for enlightenment are automatically discounted from Kant's account of aesthetic experience. This elision ought to trouble those modern subjects who feel alienated and constricted by society, in which we participate, and by history, which we all inherit. The best way to ensure that aesthetic experience remains resolutely open to otherness and nonidentity is to embrace those aspects that appear to be the most difficult to formally integrate into subjectivity. Kant's solution, which attempts to exclude and erase materiality, fails, because it damages subjectivity. Kant might respond that the subtraction necessary for

disinterest is in fact nonviolent, because its end is the subject's autonomy, which is necessary for moral agency. However, the total exclusion of all material elements in the object results in the impoverishment of the subject's experience, because subject and object are dialectically related. Kant makes clear that material elements should not enter into disinterested judgment at all.[85] This principle entails that, in aesthetic experience, the subject's own nature, history, and materiality are erased. Such erasure harms the subject, because she must deny her own history in order to be considered transcendental. Further, erasing materiality means that the subject's presentation of objectivity is distorted: she perceives an illusory image of the object rather than its full material concretion.

Disinterested contemplation is also inadequate in modernity for another reason. Since aesthetic judgment ought to express otherness or difference in order to open the subject to her own repressed experience, such judgment must actively embrace materiality, rather than excluding it. If the subject relies on feeling that is apparently subjective and formal for aesthetic judgment, she will miss the complex layers of sediment that characterize the object, as well as her own experience. Ross Wilson writes: "What is crucial in Adorno's reception of Kant's aesthetics is recognizing the significance of subjective aesthetic experience for any attempt to come to terms with aesthetic objects."[86] While I agree with Wilson that subject and object are dialectically related in aesthetic experience, it is important to note that Adorno's conception of subjectivity differs substantively from Kant's. For Adorno, the subject must not determine the object according to her own formal categories; rather, she must recognize the object's materiality. Without materiality, objects cannot express their own social-historical context, and many elements—such as historical experience, natural and somatic experience, and qualitative particularity—that inhere within the subject are marginalized. It is necessary to express historical, social, and natural experience because it remains the ground of subjectivity; without knowledge of its own ground, subjectivity cannot reflect upon its own experience. In addition, it is unethical to ignore the suffering of history, which appears most viscerally and powerfully in modern artworks. The artwork and the

[85] CJ, Section 13, Ak. 223, pp. 68-69.
[86] Ross Wilson, 'Dialectical Aesthetics and the Kantian *Rettung*: On Adorno's Aesthetic Theory', *New German Critique*, 35 (Summer, 2008), p. 62.

object of natural beauty do not primarily reflect the subject's categories; rather, they express their own layers of content, acquired through history. Kant's principle that aesthetic experience involves subjective feeling rather than objective material suggests that subjectivity has no need of empirical content, and that objectivity primarily receives, rather than spontaneously structures, subjective laws, forms, and categories.[87] For Adorno, the dialectic of subject and object entails that subjectivity is constituted by materiality, and that objectivity expresses its own agency.

Kant's argument that sensation ought to be excluded from aesthetic judgment rests on an assumption that sensation is simply a passive aspect of nature which lacks spontaneity, and which lacks the capacity to become radically other, or to negatively indicate possibility. This assumption probably derives from the Enlightenment attitude towards animals and non-human nature in general, which regards both as mechanical, lifeless, and meaningless—unless human agency employs them for some useful purpose or end. For Adorno, this model is guilty of assuming that natural matter passively shapes itself to whatever form or logic the human subject imposes upon it, regardless of the direction or potentiality contained in the natural object itself. Nature is not simply passive until the subject decides to act upon it; instead, nature—both within the subject and outside it—has its own agency. For example, there is overwhelming evidence that animals experience complex emotions, can intelligently use language, feel pain, and mourn their dead, in nearly the same manner of human subjects.[88] Additionally, thought without emotion or sensation would only refer to itself, and thus would be without content, for Adorno.[89] We can see this dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity from two different directions: it is present whenever somatic desires or needs act upon, and transform, emotions, thoughts, and the capacity to reflect; and, conversely, whenever the capacity to reflect acts upon, and transforms, those desires and needs that are

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[87] For a discussion of Kant's aesthetic formalism, see Rachel Zuckert, 'The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44 (2006), pp. 599-622.

[88] Thanks to Andre Krebber for this insight. See MM, p. 170: "So the expression called human is precisely that of the eyes closest to those of the animal, the creaturely ones, remote from the reflection of the self. At the last, soul itself is the longing of the soulless for redemption."

[89] See MM pp. 122-123.

marginalized as merely natural or historical, and therefore as worthless in epistemic, moral, or aesthetic terms. The dialectic demonstrates that subjectivity is not wholly spontaneous, because the subject's agency always interacts with, and is constrained by, natural, social, historical, and cultural forces that she cannot control. The sphere of aesthetics is not wholly autonomous from these material forces, because artistic language and technique are entwined with tradition and convention—that is, the entire artistic past, which is present in society's collective memory.[90]

Kant also maintains that cognition ought to be excluded from the judgment of taste because the criteria for the latter should have nothing to do with whether or not an object conforms to its theoretical concept.[91] While it may be true that theoretical cognition should remain independent from the judgment of taste, because the latter occurs through procedures that differ fundamentally from the epistemic process of applying a universal to a particular, Kant's principle that the domain of aesthetic judgment is primarily the experience of aesthetic feeling rather than aesthetic thought, or at least philosophical experience of some kind, has had serious effects for the definition of aesthetic experience in the post-Kantian tradition. The restriction of the end of aesthetic judgment as the feeling of pleasure or displeasure excludes philosophical reflection from aesthetic judgment—and defines aesthetics as the forgetting of historical and natural experience, since both of the latter modes require philosophical reflection if they are to become critical, and if they are to intensify the subject's experience of objectivity. Some Kant scholars might argue that aesthetic ideas implicitly ignite philosophical thought.[92] Yet, as we will see later, aesthetic ideas are divorced from their historical-social context, and are produced by reason alone; as a result, they are separate from material and concrete empirical reality. Aesthetic ideas are not subject to the transformative shifts effected by history; as such, they remain abstract signifiers, for

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[90] Adorno writes: "Literary language...objectively derives its meaning from history and this history embraces the historical process as such." Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Tradition', *Telos*, 94 (Winter, 1992-93), pp. 78.
[91] Berel Lang, 'Kant and the Subjective Objects of Taste', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 25 (Spring, 1967), pp. 247-253.
[92] Kirk Pillow, 'Understanding Aestheticized', in Rebecca Kukla (ed), *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 246.

Kant, of reason's speculative capacity; thus, reason may only achieve metaphysical experience in the realm of ideas—not in the realm of materiality.

It is also important to consider that reflective judgment, which Kant claims is non-subsumptive, proceeds from particularity to universality. Even in aesthetic reflective judgment, which of course does not classify aesthetic objects beneath concepts or logical categories, the subject still aims to pacify objectivity beneath the condition of epistemic universality—namely, the free play of imagination and understanding, which is the condition of epistemic cognition, and which produces the feeling of pleasure.[93] Thus aesthetic reflective judgment still attempts to subtract materiality from experience. This is evident in the subject's avoidance of actively immersing herself in materiality (sensation, nature, and history), which might contaminate the a priori nature of aesthetic judgment, and in the definition of aesthetic feeling as purely subjective. Reflective judgment's goal is to fold particulars into the subject's system of experience, in order to ensure that they have transcendental, and not merely empirical, significance. Thus such judgment cannot explore the empirical or material significance of particulars, which is expressed in their natural, historical, social, and moral weight. Certain Kant scholars also claim that reflective judgment is open-ended; yet, this condition disappears in Kant's description of the judgment of taste as a feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Aesthetic reflective judgment is not wholly exploratory or allowed to tarry with its object in an open-ended manner, because it is bound by Kant's principle of disinterestedness, which preserves the transcendental conditions of such judgment at the cost of losing its grounding in the past (historical and natural experience) and the future (material desire). Thus the subject has the illusion that she exists in an eternal present.

For Adorno, subjects lack the capacity to experience particularity in modern times—and they lack even the capacity to reflect upon their own absence of experience. Experience has been destroyed because of three main events: the repetitive and deadening nature of capitalist-industrial modernity; the avoidance of materiality that occurs in philosophical Idealism; and the catastrophic instrumentality and objectification that the Holocaust, as well as other atrocities in the Enlightenment period, presents. These lacunae in modern subjectivity means that, in aesthetic experience, subjects must actively

[93] CJ, Section 9, Ak. 217-218, pp. 61-62.

interpret and decipher their own lack of experience—as it is presented and configured and in artworks. Subjects' experience is presented to them indirectly in artworks, which express historical and social truth that would otherwise remain forgotten. Thus subjects require philosophical reflection so that they may apprehend—through a form of critical experience that is mediated in thought but not dominated by reason—nonidentity, or subjectivity's failure to fully comprehend objectivity. Artworks cannot be grasped using perception or intuition alone, as phenomenology hopes; nor can their meaning be deduced through symbolic interpretation, as hermeneutics avers.[94]

In conclusion, subject and object exist on a continuum; they are not strictly divorced from one another. Although subject and object have been separated historically—in capitalism, and in Idealist philosophical theory, for instance—there is always a fluid dialectic between them in experience. The doctrine of disinterested contemplation teaches that it is possible to produce autonomous judgment that is wholly divested of its grounding in materiality, nature, and history. In order to overcome the difficulties that plague Kant's concept, it is necessary to develop another concept: that of interested judgment that is mediated by reflection. If the subject is to attain self-knowledge, to understand the past that lies in objects, and to imagine another future, then she cannot forget that materiality grounds experience. In other words, objectivity composes subjectivity—nature and history cannot be separated in experience. It is impossible to wholly extirpate interests (desires, irrational biases, natural instincts, inclinations, hopes, fears, etc.) from subjectivity. Thus the subject would do better to reflect upon her own interests rather than eradicating them. When interest disappears from experience, the subject loses its unique perspective: its concrete and material point of view, shaped by history, culture, and society, without which the subject would be empty and directionless. The attempt to subtract interest from subjectivity is similar to the scientist's attempt to subtract subjective prejudice from knowledge in order to achieve an (apparently) absolute and objective standpoint. Yet interest, like prejudice, cannot be subtracted; it may only be reflected upon and exposed; such exposure reveals its falsity and allows the subject to partially overcome it. We may call this new ideal—of judgment

[94] Roger Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience* (Albany, 2007), p. 116.

that has allowed reason to work through its distorting interests, in order to make them transparent to consciousness—mediated interested judgment.

It is difficult to imagine what such judgment might look like in practice, because society's totalizing structure opposes any such engagement with materiality or nature, and because many of Kant's principles still operate in the natural sciences, and in contemporary analytic philosophy, and other positivist disciplines. Adorno compares the repression of animals in Transcendental Idealism with the fascist hatred of difference and materiality:

> Ethical dignity in Kant is a demarcation of differences. It is directed against animals. Implicitly it excludes man from nature, so that its humanity threatens incessantly to revert to the inhuman. It leaves no room for pity. Nothing is more abhorrent to the Kantian than a reminder of man's resemblance to animals. This taboo is always at work when the idealist berates the materialist. Animals play for the idealist system virtually the same role as the Jews for fascism. To revile man as an animal—that is genuine idealism. To deny the possibility of salvation for animals absolutely and at any price is the inviolable boundary of its metaphysics.[95]

To engage with interest is to remember the nature within subjectivity, as we will see in later chapters. Thus to allow mediated interested judgment could be defined as the non-repression of our resemblance to animals—the memory of what it was like to be human. This means realizing that nature is history, and that history is nature.

[95] Eduardo Mendieta, "Animal is to Kantianism as Jew is to Fascism: Adorno's Besiary," in John Sanbonmatsu, *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* (Lanham and Boulder, 2011), pp. 148, 324. The quote is from Adorno's book *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, Edmund Jephcott (trans), (Stanford, 1998), p. 8, fragment 202.

Section Two: Adorno's Concept of Natural Beauty and Aesthetic Time

In this section I argue, first, that Adorno's concept of natural beauty constitutes a dialectical critique of Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation; and, second, that natural beauty must be grounded in a concept of aesthetic time. Adorno requires a theory of aesthetic time because natural beauty is conceived both as a recollection of material history (the suffering of the past) and as a negative anticipation of utopia (or possibility, which arises from concrete actuality). Without a theory of temporality, natural beauty threatens to regress into an ideological presentation of images that may be easily reified by cultural institutions. The nonidentity present in natural beauty implicitly directs the subject to the past (through reminding her of the historical violence done to the object on behalf of the subject) and to the future (through allowing a glimmer of possibility to present itself, as nonidentity allows otherness to weave itself into experience). A theory of time will also emphasize the transitional and processual nature of the aesthetic object, as well as the fluid quality of the aesthetic subject's experience. When these aspects of subject and object are elided, the enigmatic nature of the aesthetic object is not properly realized.

I argue here that aesthetic experience requires reflection that engages with materiality (in this case, the historical sediment that alters the concept of time in modernity); and that materiality must be present in any philosophical theory that wishes to ground aesthetic experience. For example, a classical aesthetic category such as natural beauty must make reference to the historical sufferings of the past if it is to allow traditional philosophical concepts like freedom and autonomy to engage with material reality, and falling into ideological illusion. Adorno states: "Human beings are not equipped positively with dignity; rather, dignity would be exclusively what they have yet to achieve."[96] It is impossible to understand this sentence if the subject has not reflected upon her own orientation to the future, as well as the Enlightenment's history of subjugation. We will only realize that freedom is a negative concept when we are aware that, historically, the subject has sought to control the object, and that such history is expressed in philosophical categories. Since some of Adorno's concepts dialectically

[96] AT, p. 82.

negate Kantian concepts, historical experience is present in philosophical reflection; further, such experience has the power to alter that reflection itself—to change tradition into the new, with the aid of art.

Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* does not posit an explicit theory of time or temporality; thus, we must read between the lines. One could follow various argumentative paths: that Adorno's intellectual friendship with Walter Benjamin directs him to a messianic temporality[97]; or that his polemical attacks on Heidegger demonstrate that he does not wish to privilege a temporality directed towards the subject's anticipation of her own death[98]; or that Adorno's analysis of the culture industry pits him against the temporality of aimless, empty, repetitive leisure time[99]; or that modern subjects are unable to mourn, or to realize the loss of experience[100]; or, finally, that temporality must militate against the static and substantive concept of duration that operates in traditional Idealist philosophy, such as Kant's.[101]

Adorno maintains that aesthetic truth content has a "temporal essence," which begs the question of its definition.[102] A theory of temporality will clarify the truth content that inheres within natural beauty, and will impart depth to Adorno's invocations of

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[97] See the essay "On the Concept of History" in Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (eds), (Cambridge and London, 2006).

[98] For excellent discussions of the complicated relationship between Adorno and Heidegger, see Iain Macdonald and Kryzyztof Ziarek, *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions* (Stanford, 2008) and Duttmann, Alexander Garcia, Nicholas Walker (trans), *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Adorno and Heidegger* (New York and London, 2002).

[99] Theodor W. Adorno, J. M. Bernstein (ed.), *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York).

[100] See Rebecca Comay, 'Adorno's Siren Song', *New German Critique* 81 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 21-48. She writes: "...Adorno relates the modern atomization of time to a radical failure of mourning. The hatred of the past is itself the inability to give proper burial. Immigrants wipe away all traces of their past life. Out-of-print books get set aside..." (39).

[101] For instance, Gene Ray observes that social ideology constructs a static space-time continuum: "the social seems to be ruled by immutable, timeless, and therefore 'naturalized' laws, because from within society, the fact that social relations are a construction—historical, human, and thus alterable—is concealed from experience." See Gene Ray, 'Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime', in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 17 (Spring, 2004), p. 12.

[102] AT, p. 37.

utopian hope, or longing, and the memory of past suffering, or historical experience. In this section I argue that Adorno's implicit theory of temporality that structures experience must balance two distinct moments in the aesthetic object: it must balance experience that adheres, through memory, to the past sufferings of history, with experience that finds the truth content in that history of suffering, and uses it to follow transient utopian impulses that may guide us to a nonviolent acceptance of difference—and therefore to an unknown future. When subjects become aware of the historical experience that is present in materiality, and the utopian impulses that reside in everyday experience, they will become aware of the difference that structures identity, and the critical power that art expresses. Since the object's expression changes with every new historical era, and since subjectivity must respond to that expression if it wishes to respond to materiality rather than clutch at illusory projections, a theory of time is necessary. Adorno may also employ temporality to critique the permanence and thing-like stability of the Kantian transcendental subject, which appears to be outside of historical and social change.

Adorno calls the Kantian judgment of taste, which results in pleasure, "a castrated hedonism, desire without desire."[103] His argument is that the judgment of taste, while claiming to be grounded in pleasure, in fact cuts off the only source of pleasure that would remain valid for subjectivity—materiality and sensuous experience—in the name of a unified subject that remains free of heteronomous nature. Without a material ground, pleasure is not pleasure at all: it is instead abstract feeling that pretends to be concrete. Pleasurable longing, as Kant describes it, results from his theory of aesthetic judgment. Thus, aesthetic pleasure is not a concrete experience, in which the subject overcomes tension or satisfies her desire; rather, it remains abstract, because pleasure results from purely subjective dynamic between imagination and understanding, rather than an objective experience of otherness. The result of this abstraction in Kant's theory is that pleasure—which might have inspired the subject to imagine utopian possibility, or to experience the traces of transcendence through memory that are present negatively in modern art—is bound to the present, in an eternal repetition.

For Kant, the experience of the beautiful is self-grounding and divorced from both past and future: "We *linger* in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this

[103] AT, p. 14.

contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself."[104] In other words, aesthetic contemplation—the play of imagination and understanding that is present in the experience of the beautiful—does not receive materiality from the aesthetic object; rather, such contemplation is entirely self-motivating, and drives its own activity. The fact that aesthetic contemplation "reproduces" its own activity (the balance between the faculties) entails that it is isolated from the object that ought to guide the subject's experience; without any such direction, aesthetic experience has no reference to the past (that is, the history expressed in the object) or to the future (since the subject need not anticipate anything beyond her own continuing pleasure, which is perpetuated by her faculties).[105] Pleasure on this account is not the longing for transcendence; rather, it is the subject's satisfaction with what is: the shallow and empty repetition of the present moment.[106] For Kant, aesthetic contemplation does not mediate or process aspects of the object; rather, the object is excluded from such contemplation entirely, in order to construct a solipsistic and self-enclosed account of aesthetic judgment.

The word "reinforce" is also instructive; it shows that Kant wishes to defend aesthetic judgment against heteronomous influences from external forces, such as nature, history, or materiality. Once again, aesthetic judgment must protect the subject against the past—so that it is not compromised by the memory of suffering, which exposes reason's violence against nature—as well as the future—so that aesthetic judgment can remain uncritical and inwardly directed, blissfully unaware of the need for critical thought and longing that reminds the subject of nonidentity.

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[104] CJ, Section 12, Ak. 222, p. 68.
[105] Ibid., p. 68.

[106] Erica Weitzman, 'No *Fun*: Aporia of Pleasure in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory', *The German Quarterly*, 81 (Spring, 2008), pp. 185-202. Weitzman writes: "For Adorno, the disappearance of art's negativity vis-a-vis the world is always a sign, and even a cause, of 'philistinism': the abandonment of the capacity for critique in aesthetics and politics alike, and the subsequent corruption of subjectivity into a debased *Massenpsychologie*" (194). She continues: "The rejection of fun is then a preservation of the aesthetic sphere per so...[Fun entails] the collapse of the aesthetic into the real, and consequently, the loss of critical possibility as a whole" (194-195). In other words, to accept art's role as entertainment entails that artworks cannot distance themselves from reality in order to criticize it; as a result, no historical or social truth content may emerge.

As a transition to my discussion of Adorno's concept of natural beauty, let us consider Matthias Tichy's insightful discussion of the artwork, and its relation to traditional Kantian aesthetics.[107] Tichy notes that Adorno argues against Kant's conception of subjectivity: "Adorno's critique of the concept of the transcendental subject claims that philosophical cognition can only be attained by acknowledging, rather than abstracting from, individual experience...The possibility of moving from individual experience to universal cognition, therefore, lies not in subsuming experience under universal laws of thought, but in discovering a universal moment within individual experience itself...".[108] Discovering the universality within particularity does not mean reducing material qualities to abstract discursive concepts; rather, it means acknowledging that particularity has its own agency and structure that universality (wholly subjective, according to Kant) cannot capture. What exactly the acknowledgement of "individual experience" would amount to may only be discovered in the dynamism of aesthetic experience—experience that embraces, rather than abstracts from, the materiality, history, and natural character of the object itself.[109]

Tichy also claims, rightly, that Adorno's reading of the Kantian subject necessarily underwrites a radical temporality that argues for the dialectical nature of subjectivity. The subject that is materially grounded becomes other than itself through its interactions with the object. "Adorno's interpretation of Kant's 'intelligible character' suggests how we might understand realm [sic] of 'the intelligible' without pre-supposing the idea of self-preserving subjectivity...the individual self can change precisely through its experience of the other or its externalisation to the other without simply losing itself in the process".[110] In this way, Kant's conception of static subjectivity, in which the subject's transcendental laws and principles preserve it from objectivity, is criticized

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[107] Matthias Tichy, 'The Anticipation of the True Concept of the Universal in Art and Experience', in Simon Jarvis (ed.), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume I (4 vols:* London and New York, 2007).
[108] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of…', p. 222.
[109] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of…', p. 222.
[110] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of …', p. 227.

immanently.[111] That is, Kant's concept of the subject claims to endure through time, and to produce objective judgments; however, the subject may only endure through time if it alters itself according to its material experiences, and it may only produce objective judgments if it listens to the object, rather than covering it over through judgments that claim a priori status.

Tichy also observes that the artwork has a "dynamic self-identity" that develops and becomes other through time.[112] This is because the artwork's materials are social and historical in nature, and yet those materials are capable of becoming autonomous through the work's formal innovations (the "specific constellation" of the artwork's "unity").[113] The reason why the artwork's material, formally wrought, is experienced by the subject as new is due to its reconfiguration within the work itself—a reconfiguration that critically negates history and tradition.[114]

Finally, Tichy argues that Kant's conception of subjectivity cannot be sustained in light of Adorno's insight that the object's structure and agency is independent of the subject's constituting power. Tichy writes: "It is clear that the relationship between the aesthetic subject and the work of art here cannot be interpreted traditionally in terms of an underlying subject regarded as the indispensable presupposition of anything and everything objective."[115] Since the aesthetic subject's rationality has become corrupted through the instrumental imperative—that is, the demand to perceive objects in terms of value that is oriented towards practical-utilitarian ends rather than in terms of its intrinsic, qualitative value, which resists exploitation—it cannot be the foundation of aesthetic

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[111] For an excellent analysis of Adorno's debt to Hegel, see Brian O'Connor's chapter "Adorno's Reconception of the Dialectic." Immanent critique assesses phenomena according to their own professed standards or criteria. Since this critique produces insights into the untruth of the phenomena, it is related to (or an early stage of) determinate negation (548). Determinate negation "proceeds through a rational response to the experience of contradiction" (548). Immanent critique proceeds through a "logic of disintegration," without a positive moment (551). Brian O'Connor, 'Adorno's Reconception of the Dialectic', in Stephen Houlgate and Michael Bauer (eds), *A Companion to Hegel* (Hoboken, 2011), pp. 537-555.
[112] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of…', p. 233.
[113] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of…', p. 233.
[114] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of the …', p. 233.
[115] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of the…', p. 243.

experience, which, for Adorno, ought to ground an experience of the subject's limitations rather than valorizing an illusory strength.[116] Tichy continues that Adorno's "concept of experience"—in which particularity exposes the limitations of rationality, and expresses the suffering inflicted by rationality on nature—implicitly criticizes Kant's concept of experience, in which the object is meaningless and chaotic without the subject's principled imposition of order.[117] The subject, for Adorno, must realize that the ground of experience is materiality (nature and history) rather than Kantian "pure laws of thought."[118]

The Temporality of Adorno's Concept of Natural Beauty

We have seen that Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation is inadequate for modern aesthetic experience, which must remember its natural-historical ground, while anticipating an experience of otherness in the future that does not yet exist. In this section I argue that Adorno's concept of natural beauty responds to Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation and that the former concept is grounded in a theory of temporality that Adorno repeatedly evokes but does not make explicit. First, I discuss how natural beauty dialectically negates disinterested contemplation; second, I explore natural beauty's ground in the past (natural-historical experience); finally, I examine natural beauty's ground in the future (the anticipation of a utopian comportment).

Before we discuss how natural beauty dialectically negates disinterested contemplation, let me discuss Bernstein's reading of Kantian interest, which differs from my own. Bernstein argues that, for Adorno, Kantian 'interest' is "deforming" and damaging to nature: "these instrumental ways of knowing and acting, are broadly self-

[116] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*…, p. 226: "Adorno's and Horkheimer's contention [in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*] that the fatalities of reason are premised upon and have their foundation in the drive for self-preservation; a drive for mastery and control…instrumental reason, the reduction of cognition to means-ends calculation and hence to instrumentality, is grounded in the anthropological foundations of the human species…the irrationality of instrumental reason [is that]…a…part of reason came to be taken for the whole…".
[117] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of the…', p. 230.
[118] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of the…', p. 230.

interested, in the interest of survival, without effective concern for the well-being and worth of others".[119] For Bernstein, then, interest is bound to instrumental reason, which is unable to properly experience the qualities of the object that it subsumes. Interest harms the subject's capacity to act ethically as well as her capacity to theoretically cognize objects. Bernstein continues:

> Those transcendental interests provide original horizons of intelligibility through which items light up as either knowable or as in relation to desire and worth. In aesthetics we must be disinterested in those very orienting interests, those ways of the world lighting up for us. The kind of disinterest necessary for aesthetic reflective judgment is thus against those determining interests that specify what knowing and acting are….[120]

Bernstein argues that interests act to structure the world according to the subject's desires and needs; on this reading, interests must be suppressed in order for the subject to gain autonomy from her heteronomous nature, which continually distracts reason. Yet, as we will see, natural desires and needs may serve to orient the subject towards the future (towards possibility) and towards the past (towards the suffering of nature through the history of reason); thus, they are necessary in order to bring the subject to awareness of her own history, and to grant her a brief glimpse of utopian otherness, which demonstrates that reason cannot comprehend the object's materiality. The aesthetic object also expresses history and truth through the tension that it embodies between past and future.

For Bernstein, Kantian interests are the expressions of natural impulses that distort reason and cause actions to be purely instrumental and goal-oriented.[121] Aesthetic reflective judgment resists this instrumentality because it allows the subject to resist those natural impulses (e.g., self-preservation) that attempt to govern her rational thought.[122] Yet Bernstein's reading forgets Adorno's argument that natural beauty was suppressed as

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[119] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1169.
[120] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1070.
[121] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1071.
[122] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1071.

a result of the Idealist valorization of spontaneity and lawfulness, which raises humanity above the animal kingdom, and above nature in general.[123] More specifically, Adorno argues that nature should not be abstractly opposed to history: the image of nature as chaotic, as without agency or freedom, and as spiritless arose at a particular historical juncture, and for reasons not unrelated to the subject's naïve faith in its own capacity to determine the world of objects through its own authority. Finally, I have argued that, while interests may introduce natural inclination or prejudice into experience, the most effective manner of encountering such prejudice is not to attempt to erase it from experience, but rather to carefully consider its genealogy and composition, so that the subject may experience her objectivity to the full. In short, only by *intensifying* the subject's material ground, and not by abstractly negating it, may the subject rise above the natural or mythical element in her subjectivity, and become critically reflective.

We have seen that Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation expresses a disregard for nature, history, and material experience. Kant argues that it is necessary to achieve an a priori and transcendental aesthetic judgment that remains isolated from empirical experience in order to ground the subject's autonomy and spontaneity. However, Kant's position brings many problems with it. In the following passage, Adorno argues that exalting human dignity at the expense of the subject's material and qualitative experience does violence to her experience, because it abstracts from the objectivity that inheres within it:

> If the case of natural beauty were pending, dignity would be found culpable for having raised the human animal above the animal. In the experience of nature, dignity reveals itself as subjective usurpation that degrades what is not subordinate to the subject—the qualities—to mere material and expulses it from art as a totally indeterminate potential, even though art requires it according to its own concept.[124]

The philosophical Idealist's hierarchy, in which the human subject is considered to be above the animal, or nature, subtracts qualitative and material experience from the artwork and from aesthetic experience, which are assumed to require extensive mediation

[123] AT, pp. 81-82.
[124] AT, p. 82.

in order to express truth or beauty. Both Kant and Hegel assume that material is merely chaotic and therefore incapable of structuring experience without extensive mediation by the subject's formal and logical principles.[125]

Adorno argues that natural beauty presents the nonidentical—that is, the evidence that reason fails in its attempts to master and dominate nature using subjective concepts and categories. The nonidentical comes to light when the object appears as *more* than the subject's concepts claim that it is. Thus that which escapes the subject's concepts provides proof that the object cannot be determined by subjectivity alone: that it remains inexhaustible. This is what natural beauty expresses. However, the transcendence in artistic and natural beauty is necessarily fleeting, due to the coercive nature of the total social context, or what Adorno calls the spell: "Natural beauty is the trace of the nonidentical in things under the spell of universal identity. As long as this spell prevails, the nonidentical has no positive existence."[126] Thus natural beauty responds to Kant's attempt to remove the materiality from experience in order to preserve the subject's autonomy and transcendental status.[127] For Adorno, the Kantian subject operates under

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[125] Nigel Mapp, 'No Nature, No Nothing: Adorno, Beckett, Disenchantment', in David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp (eds), *Adorno and Literature* (London and New York, 2006), p. 160: "The dialectic of disenchantment is at work. Kant formulates its terms; and legislates them for eternity. Disenchanted nature, passive, mathematized and meaningless, is sundered from a disembodied, utterly empty, subject, the pure source of all knowing and willing. To subtract all meaning from material is to subtract all substance from the subject."

[126] AT, p. 95.

[127] For an excellent analysis of Horkheimer's and Adorno's relation to Kant and Freud, see Seyla Benhabib's article "Autonomy as Mimetic Reconciliation." Benhabib writes that the dialectic of enlightenment "is critique in the sense of 'psychoanalytic reflection': what is forgotten cannot be recalled at will; all forgetting originates with a trauma. The forgotten can only be recalled, made present to oneself, in the effort to relive the trauma and break the spell of the past upon the present" (27). This means that reason must learn to reflect upon what it has repressed or forgotten in order to overcome its trauma (that is, the trauma of excluding nature from experience and of seeking to dominate particularity through conceptualization) (27-28). The traditional or Kantian concept of autonomy entails the repression and constriction of the self—not its liberation (27). Seyla Benhabib, 'Autonomy as Mimetic Reconciliation', in Simon Jarvis (ed.), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, *Volume II* (4 vols: London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

the principle that everything material must be made spiritual—except for the thing-in-itself, which is a mere placeholder that remains indeterminate. Although Kant does not extend the principle of the spiritualization of nature as far as Hegel does, he still uses it to dominate the natural world, which is reflected in Kant's definition of the subject's autonomy.

Adorno inherits Kant's claim that purposeless comportment, which is not oriented towards action, epistemic ends, or practical use, appears in disinterested contemplation. However, Adorno radicalizes Kant's claim so that it does not result in a restrictive portrait of the subject as a formal shell without concrete materiality: "Nature, as appearing beauty, is not perceived as an object of action. The sloughing off of the aims of self-preservation—which is emphatic in art—is carried out to the same degree in aesthetic experience of nature."[128] While Kant claims to achieve a non-practical comportment—purposiveness without purpose—Adorno argues that such comportment only appears negatively in natural beauty, which modern artworks imitate. "Art does not imitate nature…but natural beauty as such."[129] Nature is the dialectical opposite of history. Thus mere nature that is unmediated by historical becoming remains static or merely mythical. Likewise, history that claims to be unmediated by nature remains purely rational, and therefore an ideological model of progress that forgets its material ground.[130] Truth lies in the dialectical intertwining of history and nature. From Adorno's point of view, Kant's disinterested contemplation is an orientation to objectivity that claims to isolate the subject from its roots in nature. However, the dialectic of Enlightenment demonstrates that any attempt to isolate the subject from nature only exposes its own deep entanglement in nature; thus, reason becomes irrational when it forgets its own natural composition.

Adorno's inheritance of Kant's concept is also evident in the dialectical reversal of disinterestedness that natural beauty effects. "What nature strives for in vain, artworks

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[128] AT, p. 86.
[129] AT, p. 94.

[130] See Benhabib, 'Autonomy as Mimetic…', p. 43: Kantian autonomy "…presupposes the repression of nature; the more this repression is developed, all the more does the self become nature-like and cease to be autonomous...The continued domination of nature renders the self nature-like".

fulfill: They open their eyes. Once it no longer serves as an object of action, appearing nature itself imparts expression, whether that of melancholy, peace, or something else."[131] In other words, artworks, into which natural beauty has migrated in industrial-capitalist modernity, become the focal point for a new kind of agency, which resides within subjectivity that acknowledges the materiality within itself. The truly purposeless object, perceived in a non-practical and non-instrumental manner, would not be without material, natural, or historical qualities; rather, it would embrace its own qualitative composition in order to reflect on its own history, and the suffering within that history; in addition, the object would display its agency to the subject, in order to resist the attempt at abstract or external subsumption through concepts or forms. The aim of natural beauty, like disinterested contemplation, is an object that has been stripped of heteronomous determination through subjective mediation: "With human means art wants to realize the language of what is not human."[132]

Finally, in a brief genealogy of natural beauty, Adorno claims that the concept disappeared as the philosophy of Idealism dominated theoretical debates on aesthetics. For instance, Kant's heavy reliance on the subject's freedom to ground the concept of dignity—although Kantian freedom is a negative concept that never enters into experience, but instead grounds reason as the producer of a priori moral laws and moral judgment—contributes to the downgrading of natural beauty.

> Natural beauty vanished from aesthetics as a result of the burgeoning domination of the concept of freedom and human dignity, which was inaugurated by Kant and then rigorously transplanted into aesthetics by Schiller and Hegel; in accord with this concept nothing in the world is worthy of attention except that for which the autonomous subject has itself to thank.[133]

Now I will turn to natural beauty's firm grounding in the past—that is, natural and historical experience. The past is the first aspect of natural beauty's rootedness in temporality. At the beginning of his chapter, Adorno asserts that natural beauty constitutes a kind of painful recollection of the violence that the artwork "inflicts" on

[131] AT, p. 86.
[132] AT, p. 100.
[133] AT, pp. 81-82.

nature:[134] "The concept of natural beauty rubs on a wound, and little is needed to prompt one to associate this wound with the violence that the artwork—a pure artifact—inflicts on nature."[135] He continues that the artwork and nature, although apparently in opposition to each other, dialectically collapse into each other, since (natural) immediacy can only be understood through social and cultural concepts, which are inevitably historically mediated; and, since the artwork (an artifact) ideally presents the subject with the memory of damaged nature, which modern society wishes to repress.[136] The definition of natural beauty as, in part, the memory of past violence is important because it shows that the subject's experience is oriented not towards a pure, empty, formal present, but instead towards a concrete (non-mythological) past, heavily mediated by the pain, guilt, shame, and horror that accompany the experiences of nature and of history.

Adorno claims: "Natural beauty…is at its core historical…".[137] Natural beauty is historical not just because the concept itself develops or regresses throughout historical time, although that is of course also true; rather, the concept is historical because it casts subjectivity into an abyss that causes her to experience the violence and the suffering of history and nature—rather like Adorno's cryptic metaphor for the artwork as a message in a bottle, which is addressed to the unknown agent of the future, who will hopefully examine its contents with care and sympathy.[138] I will discuss the future orientation of natural beauty later.

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[134] AT p. 81. J. M. Bernstein, 'Intact and Fragmented Bodies: Versions of Ethics "After Auschwitz"', *New German Critique*, No. 97 'Adorno and Ethics' (Winter, 2006), pp. 31-52. "There are moments when Adorno identifies the nonidentical—as that which is the refuse of identifying practices or as what does not fit the ideal categories and concepts of rationalized reason—with diffuse nature, as if once everything fully compatible with rational form were hygienically gathered together, only diffuse, heterogeneous nature would remain" (46).
[135] AT, p. 81.
[136] AT, p. 81.
[137] AT, p. 85.

[138] James Hellings, 'Messages in a Bottle and Other Things Lost to the Sea: The Other Side of Critical Theory or a Reevaluation of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory', *Telos*, Volume 160 (Fall 2012), pp. 77-97.

Adorno discusses the concept of cultural landscape as an example of how natural beauty was subject to transformation and corrosion over time. A cultural landscape is a kind of constructed or semi-artificial scene that strives to integrate natural and cultural elements—for instance, "hillside towns that are related to their setting by the use of its stone."[139] Cultural landscapes, although they may seem merely conservative in their integration of the natural and the cultural, instead have a capacity to resist the dominant tendency of rationality towards irrationality and repression. Adorno details how this subversive tendency appears:

> But perhaps the most profound source of resistance stored in the cultural landscape is the expression of history that is compelling, aesthetically, because it is etched by the real suffering of the past. The figure of the constrained gives happiness because the force of constraint must not be forgotten; its images are a memento. The cultural landscape…embodies a wailful lament that has since fallen mute. Without historical remembrance there would be no beauty.[140]

The memory of past suffering has the power to evoke happiness, which is always critical, negative, and at one with aesthetic illusion. Such happiness itself—the orientation of the subject who remembers the violence and pain of the past, and strives to integrate it into her experience, thus indirectly anticipating utopian reconciliation—is a force of resistance, because it constitutes both the object's expression of suffering as well as the subject's mediated reaction to that suffering.

Adorno confirms that natural beauty's virtue is that it allows the subject to achieve consciousness of the violence of reason as it dominated, and continues to dominate, nature. Such consciousness enables the possibility that reflection will intercede in experience that is at present governed by blind and irrational forces. "Along the trajectory of its rationality and through it, humanity becomes aware in art of what rationality has erased from memory and of what its second reflection serves to remind us."[141] Thus, natural beauty confirms the truth content of aesthetic experience, which is both negative and positive: it is negative in that truth does not yet exist, and may never

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[139] AT, p. 84.
[140] AT, p. 85.
[141] AT, p. 87.

exist due to the social context of immanence; at the same time, it is positive because truth always arises from untruth, or concrete historical experience; for this reason, truth is occasionally able to flash up in the subject's experience.

Yet Adorno confirms that the awareness that the subject may gain in natural beauty is highly somatic and visceral—it is not merely abstract or formal, although it is mediated through reason: "Consciousness does justice to the experience of nature only when, like impressionist art, it incorporates nature's wounds."[142] To incorporate nature's wounds would be to engage with the materiality of reason—its natural and historical ground—instead of suspending or neutralizing it, as Kant tries to do. The subject engages with materiality when she remembers the suffering of the past, and when she traces the history present in natural beauty (whether in artworks or natural objects) through mimetic second reflection.

Adorno returns to the contradiction (which also appears in the experience of Dadaist and Surrealist artworks, discussed in Chapters Three and Five) that aesthetic experience that is appropriate to its object requires both "unconscious apperception" and reflective cognition.[143] It is difficult to ascertain what unconscious apperception might amount to in practice, but it could look like a kind of comportment that is guided by mimetic impulses rather than self-conscious rationality.

> If nature can in a sense only be seen blindly [that is, without discursive understanding or determinate judgment, JNK], the aesthetic imperatives of unconscious apperception and remembrance are at the same time archaic vestiges incompatible with the increasing maturation of reason. Pure immediacy does not suffice for aesthetic experience. Along with the involuntary it requires volition, concentrating consciousness; the contradiction is ineluctable.[144]

The temporality of aesthetic experience—its ground in the past and the future—contributes to my argument, elaborated in Chapter Four, that interpretation, or philosophical reflection, is a necessary condition of aesthetic experience, and that philosophical reflection requires the materiality given in aesthetic experience. The

[142] AT, p. 89.
[143] AT, p. 90.
[144] AT, p. 90.

subject's experience is held in tension between past and future; thus, it requires philosophical thought to remember the various aspects of the artwork, and to anticipate and imagine that which it only negatively indicates. This is why since aesthetic experience is a process, and the artwork is a force field.

Now I will examine natural beauty's grounding in the future. James Hellings insightfully argues that the work of art may best be conceived as a message in a bottle; this metaphor captures the processual nature of the work, its orientation towards the future, as well as its dangerous and precarious life, as the work travels through history: "Art, then, is constructed, circulated and received as if it were a message in a bottle, openly addressing imaginary witnesses of an uncertain future".[145] The work, although grounded in history, must to an extent transcend the spell of empirical reality and look forward, to an imaginary audience, if it is to break the spell of past tradition and anticipate a new and different future. Earlier, Hellings remarks: "Art—as recollection of a freedom and promise of a happiness that has not and that may never come to pass—shows the reified and administered world what it is missing, for 'an "it shall be different" is hidden in even the most sublimated work of art' (*C* 93)".[146] The imperative to imagine differently, and critically, is operative in both Dada and Surrealism, as we shall see in later chapters. Thus even those works that are most "sublimated"—for instance, art that seems to domesticate or repeat the mythic images of capitalism, like some Dada objects—obliquely refer to difference and otherness.[147] Hellings rightly notes that the past recollection and the future promise of the artwork refer to each other; in addition, capitalism, which is mired in the present, is unable to tolerate difference or otherness: for this reason, its temporality remains static and repetitive. Hellings also notes that the enigmatic character of art is bound up with its future-directedness, and its precarious situation on the ocean of history. The work's enigmatic character is lost when it becomes commodified or exploited by official culture. "What Duttmann refers to as art's 'genuine address' or 'enigmatic character or quality' (*AA* 85), is that hopeless invitation made by messages in a bottle: toward *an entirely Other*, an uncertain and unknown future

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[145] James Hellings, *Adorno and Art: Aesthetic Theory Contra Critical Theory* (Basingstoke and New York, 2014), p. 58.
[146] Hellings, *Adorno and Art*…, p. 7.
[147] Hellings, *Adorno and Art*…, p. 7.

imaginary witness. […] Unlike discursive knowledge, art does not construct concepts, […] or transmit messages. […] But, art does *resemble* judgement, knowledge and language, its quasi-logic crystallises historical content in and through *form*".[148] The work's form, not its content, expresses historical and social forces at work in the unconscious agency of the work; its expression is an aesthetic language that remains nonidentical with discursive language. Finally, Hellings notes that Adorno inherits Kant's concept of enlightened maturity, but that the former wishes to integrate it into a concept of imaginative spontaneity and resistance: "Cultivating mature, ruthless, uncompromisingly critical thinkers and spontaneous, imaginative, free spirits—this was Adorno's challenge…Free spirits are politically active subjects, for them society is not beyond re-imagining. Adorno's social praxis made full use of both the critical faculty and the faculty of imagination, art, and the construction of the aesthetic, to achieve this change".[149] Aesthetic theory, then, must be an *intellectual experience* of the highest order; only a certain kind of artwork, that remains aware of the present situation, that does not forget the suffering of the past, and that is capable of speculation about the future, may impart such a critical experience. At the same time, aesthetic experience requires imagination if it is to embrace utopia: the possibility of possibility itself.[150]

Adorno's concept of natural beauty forces the subject to confront absolute otherness: the future, or that which does not yet exist. Natural beauty's transience—the illusory image that briefly appears through the wreckage of capitalism—is an orientation towards utopia, which inspires longing for otherness that would be recognized nonviolently. This is also why natural beauty constitutes a radical critique of capitalism, for which every object in society must be put to some use or practical end, and also a critique of Idealism, for which materiality must be mediated by subjectivity in order to become valuable in epistemic, moral, or aesthetic terms. Adorno observes: "nature, as it stirs mortally and tenderly in its beauty, does not yet exist."[151] That is, natural beauty exists as a potential that has yet to be made actual: it is the possibility of materiality that would resist the subject's desire that such materiality conform to its own formal logic.

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[148] Hellings, *Adorno and Art*…, p. 61.
[149] Hellings, *Adorno and Art*…, p. 52.
[150] Hellings, *Adorno and Art*…, p. 52.
[151] AT, p. 96.

Said otherwise, natural beauty is materiality that shows its own agency and logic through structuring itself—in a way that aesthetic second reflection, but not reason or understanding, appreciates.

Natural beauty engages with history while also extracting the utopian fragments from within that history. For instance, philosophical reflection tells us that "Human beings are not equipped positively with dignity; rather, dignity would be exclusively what they have yet to achieve. This is why Kant situated it in the intelligible character rather than consigning it to the empirical sphere."[152] Instead of reading utopian possibility in the intelligible sphere, however—which is what traditional philosophical Idealism did—Adorno reads it in the "empirical sphere," that is, in the constellation of history and nature that inheres within natural beauty.[153]

Natural beauty signifies the potential, which lies within objectivity, that actuality and possibility may be reconciled in a nonviolent synthesis. That is, natural beauty presents the utopian longing that arises from material experience—without sacrificing either materiality or possibility. Such longing is for a future that does not yet exist, as Adorno observes: "The identity of the artwork with the subject is as complete as the identity of nature with itself should some day be."[154] Adorno continues that the course of the spiritual infiltration of artworks, begun in the Enlightenment—the relentless mediation of apparently raw nature by subjectivity—preserved aesthetic autonomy (according to Kant and Hegel), but damaged nature's agency in the process.[155] This is why the dialectic of Enlightenment, which claims to be progressive and emancipatory, is ultimately a "course of devastation."[156]

Natural beauty inspires the subject to long for that which does not yet exist; thus, even though it is mediated by society and history, it promises transcendence from the repetition of the social totality that subjects are caught within: "Natural beauty remains the allegory of this beyond in spite of its mediation through social immanence."[157]

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[152] AT, p. 82.
[153] AT, p. 82.
[154] AT, p. 82.
[155] AT, p. 82.
[156] AT, p. 82.
[157] AT p. 90.

Adorno makes clear that aesthetic experience requires engaged subjectivity—which must both experience and reflect upon the object, and the layers of history and materiality that compose it—if it is to release objects' potentiality: "natural beauty, the unexpected promise of something that is highest, cannot remain locked in itself but is rescued only through that consciousness that is set in opposition to it."[158] At the same time, however, natural beauty indicates the object's capacity to complicate and critique the subject's abstract categories. Thus natural beauty emanates from the object: "What is beautiful in nature is what appears to be more than what is literally there. […] natural beauty points to the primacy of the object in aesthetic experience."[159] The experience of the beautiful is an experience of possibility that is disclosed by nonidentity: the difference between category and particular, between abstract repetition and differentiated becoming, indicates the difference between the present and the future.

Finally, Adorno remarks that natural beauty "is suspended history, a moment of becoming at a standstill."[160] This cryptic line indicates that natural beauty is an aesthetic image of becoming-other, or dynamic transformation, which is both untethered from the past and yet firmly grounded in it. We may see this paradoxical movement, for instance, in Dada and Surrealism, which retrieve and redeem conventional or traditional elements in order to make them new, subversive, and transformative. The dialectic of natural beauty causes the past to turn into the future—and the old to become the new.[161] Thus the notion that natural beauty imitates the actual, or literal, is inaccurate. Rather, it imitates the not-yet-actual: possibility. Natural beauty's negative image of the future is nothing other than the mimetic drive to desire otherness in a non-dominating fashion: "The being-in-itself to which artworks are devoted is not the imitation of something real but rather the anticipation of a being-in-itself that does not yet exist, of an unknown that—by way of the subject—is self-determining. Artworks say that something exists in itself, without predicating anything about it."[162] The "unknown" is "self-determining" because it remains independent of the subject's projections (private fantasies, fears, and desires),

[158] AT p. 97.
[159] AT p. 92.
[160] AT p. 93.
[161] AT, p. 95.
[162] AT, p. 100.

and the coercive social totality, and yet must respond both to the subject and to the social context without finding itself over-determined by them.[163] The sphere of the aesthetic is the only site at which such a dialectical interaction may safely take place: the delicate balance between actuality and possibility finds its most articulate expression in the artwork.

I call the tension between the past and the future in natural beauty *metamorphic temporality* because it indicates that the suffering of the past ought to be remembered as we speculate, and imagine, different possible futures—or, as we remain open to the possibility of possibility itself. That is, the recollection of the historical past does not over-determine the future, or negate its radically open character; conversely, attending to the future should not require that we forget or repress the past. On the contrary, both extremes refer to each other: the past, which appears determinate, reveals aspects of itself that are open—that express utopian possibility; and the future, which may appear to be wholly indeterminate, reveals that it too refers back to historical traces, even in its most radical potentiality. This is why the two extremes metamorphose into each other—without becoming identical to each other. The longing for otherness is grounded in the suffering of nonidentity; the memory of suffering entails that the subject desires possibility. Metamorphic temporality also explains the unsettling tension embodied in natural beauty, in which the aesthetic object presents the appearance of that which is more than what merely is in addition to provoking the recollection of the historical sufferings of nature and humanity.

Metamorphic temporality allows aspects of the artwork to become other or different from what they are. Such differentiation occurs through temporal disintegration, which appears through processes of interpretation and mimetic perception. Thus both subject and artwork contribute to the unveiling of the work. In this way, aesthetic time acts to dissolve what formerly appears as rigid, immobile, and fixed. For example, a Dadaist object, such as Hans Arp's "Entombment of the Birds and Butterflies (Head of Tzara)," cannot be categorized as a single symbol; its uncanny power depends upon the

[163] AT, p. 100.

subject's capacity to attend to minute, seemingly insignificant details (Figure 1).[164] Since attention is a temporal action, the experience is a process of becoming, not an isolated instant or motionless point. Arp's work appears as a face without features; several strange or unknown animals; a beating heart; a glimpse of the starry night; charcoal and ash; a sleeping or dead bird; an archaic magical or spiritual object; or something else entirely.[165] A new concept of aesthetic time would foreground the artwork's capacity to dissolve itself over time, and to reveal its truth content. Arp's work might demonstrate that the immobility of sculpture—which imitates death, since traditionally it has been assumed to exist beyond time—reverses into extreme mobility, since the subject's imagination subjects every detail of the work to metamorphosis. In this way, Arp tries to transform the experience of stasis, for instance, the reified experience generated by WWI, into the experience of indeterminacy, such as the possibility of a new beginning for humanity, and the fear that the cultural past will immolate the present. Recent history was always the driving force behind Dada's various incarnations across the world. Rudolf Kuenzli writes:

> The artists among the dada group in Zurich also tore apart existing visual construction, arbitrarily rearranging the resulting fragments. Hans Arp described this deconstruction as his attempt to undermine 'the trumpets, the flags and money, through which repeatedly killings of millions were organized on the field of honour.' As the major cause of the war, Arp singled out human reliance on logic and reason: 'Modern times, with their science and technology, turned man towards megalomania. The confusion of our epoch results from this overestimation of reason.' Arp saw in the deconstruction of the cultural construct of reason the principle function of his and dada art and poetry.[166]

Let us return to the main argument of the thesis. Through the metamorphic temporality embodied in natural beauty, philosophy is able to connect to the past and to imagine another possible future. Thus, philosophy needs art so that the former is

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[164] Gale, *Dada and Surrealism* (London, 1997), p. 66.
[165] Gale, *Dada and Surrealism*, p. 66.
[166] Rudolf Kuenzli (ed.), *Dada: Themes and Movements* (London and New York, 2006), p. 20.

grounded in materiality. That is, the imagination must remain connected to materiality rather than abstraction if it is to allow for utopian longing while not repressing its own ground. On the other hand, the dynamic tension embodied in metamorphic temporality radicalizes the aesthetic subject through causing her to both recollect the past and to imagine the future. In other words, aesthetic temporality allows the subject to reflect on the infinitely various aspects of the work, which exist in tension with each other, and which are always in process; thus, it allows her to accept a kind of uncertainty in her experience. The risk of this conception of temporality is that it would result in the fragmentation of the subject: experience would be held in tension between past and future, and the subject would remain isolated from her own spontaneity and reason. We may avoid this fragmentation through allowing philosophical reflection to intervene in aesthetic experience; the former allows perspective on the material process of experience itself. In addition, philosophy is necessary for art because it grounds the necessarily speculative, or transcendental, character of art, which always goes beyond mere existence, or that which is. In this way we may connect this first chapter to the main argument of the thesis: that art requires philosophy, which critically examines and intensifies the artwork's relation to its other—society and history; and, that philosophy requires art, so that its speculative nature remains connected to materiality.

Chapter Two: Kant's Concept of the Sublime and Adorno's Concept of the Shudder
Section One: Poetic Perception

In the last chapter we focused on those aspects of Kant's aesthetics which foreground the subject's sovereignty. Adorno argues against Kant that, in order to attain the truth of subjectivity, we must first acknowledge the agency of objectivity or materiality. For this reason, let us now turn to those moments in the third *Critique* in which objectivity briefly appears. Adorno's aesthetics proceeds dialectically: examining the subject entails examining the object. We will first focus on the sublime because it provides evidence that the confrontation between subject and object results in a crisis: whether to embrace materiality's constitution of subjectivity or whether to claim that subjectivity remains independent of materiality. The first path defines subject and object as porous and fluid; the second path defines subject and object as static and brittle. Adorno follows the first path; Kant follows the second. Another way of discussing this crisis, which occurs in a particularly acute form in late capitalist modernity, is to ask: Can materiality be reduced to subjective categories, or does it instead challenge and overturn those categories? In other words, does historical experience change reason's composition, or can it be domesticated by reason itself? I argue here that materiality certainly does alter rationality—in unexpected and powerful ways. Coming to grips with reason's materiality necessarily means coming to grips with the history of reason itself. Reason's materiality—its natural-historical ground—is expressed most powerfully in modern artworks.

Adorno subjects Kant's concept of the sublime to immanent critique: the sublime's apparent allegiance to freedom is measured against its actual historical role in the twentieth century. While certain features of Kant's concept of the sublime may be salvaged and recuperated in modernity, so that they may respond critically to capitalist and Idealist irrationality, other elements must be negated and transformed in order to retain their critical and utopian potential. Such dialectical treatment must always measure itself against the historical and social reality in which the concept is embedded. For example, we might ask whether Kant's concept of respect is an appropriate moral concept for humanity in modern times, or whether it should be re-evaluated, given our knowledge

of nature's repression (as it appears in, for instance, the environmental crisis), or whether imagination might express the unconscious desires of the subject. In Section Two of this chapter, I examine Adorno's concept of the shudder, his dialectical transformation of the sublime.

Before we begin, it may be useful to reflect upon why exactly the category of the sublime is valuable or relevant now, in the twenty-first century, and also why Adorno considered the category worth reviving in the mid-twentieth century. The experience of the sublime forces the subject to confront the fact that reason often perpetuates violence in its attempt to master nature. The twentieth century presents reason's irrational attempts to formalize its knowledge of nature—in order to establish rational hegemony over nature. Reason has become purely formal: reason may analyze the most efficient means for attaining a goal while ignoring the goal's intrinsic value. For example, Itay Snir quotes from *Minima Moralia* on the calculative nature of moral reasoning: "'Science in general,' writes Adorno, 'relates to nature and man only as the insurance company relates to life and death. Whoever dies in unimportant: it is a question of ratio between accidents and the company's liabilities.' In other words, even human life is stripped of intrinsic value, and regarded as a datum in the economic calculations."[167] In order to fight against such abstraction, Adorno argues that art must present particularity, or material quality, rather than universality, which subjective reason produces by abstracting qualities from the object. Gillian Rose, in *The Melancholy Science,* notes that, for Adorno, an object is always "the result of a process" of constitution, and therefore bound up with the social-historical totality.[168] When an object's particularity is reduced to universality, its processual history is repressed, and it becomes reified or static.

In the third *Critique*, Kant argues that reason and understanding perform different tasks: reason follows moral laws, while understanding constructs empirical concepts. In the "Introduction," Kant asserts: "The understanding legislates a priori for nature, as

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[167] Itay Snir, 'The "new categorical imperative" and Adorno's aporetic moral philosophy', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 43 (2010), pp. 411.

[168] Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London and New York, 2014), pp. 80, 199.

object of sense, in order to give rise to theoretical cognition of nature in a possible experience. Reason legislates a priori for freedom and for freedom's own causality, in other words, for the supersensible in the subject, in order to give rise to unconditioned practical cognition."[169] However, Adorno argues that, in an era destroyed by imperialism, capitalism, and fascism, reason and understanding have both been affected by processes that damage experience; as a result, little difference exists in practice between reason and understanding, because both faculties carry out similar processes: namely, the conversion of quality into quantity. Moral judgment, as a result, should not be considered a faculty that may transcend historical causality; instead, arguably, the functions of such judgment are constituted by historical causality. Reason's autonomy resulted from its ability to control the subject's inner nature (drives and desires that must be sublimated so that reason may legislate morally); however, that autonomy has vanished now that reason's control has become repressive, and without a principle that might limit it. In modernity, and especially in the twentieth century, reason and nature both desire to preserve themselves at any cost. Thus, reason cannot be considered independent of historical circumstances, because modern social conditions themselves enforced reason's fearful desire for control. While reason for Kant may have the capacity of moral discernment, reason has been largely stripped of its powers in late capitalist society. In short, all of the subject's faculties have been damaged by modernization. Thus, Adorno's term instrumental reason arguably refers to the pure functionality of understanding and reason in the era of Enlightenment's irrationality—since both operate through the subjugation of material difference.

Consider our present society, in which the distortion of rationality appears in the public sphere, especially during times of political and social crisis. Roger S. Foster observes: "Politicians, Benjamin Barber notes, are 'merchandized and sold as commodities to a public regarded not as a body of public citizens but as a clientele'".[170] He continues: "A political speech is encountered today not as a single, sustained piece of persuasive thinking; it is dissected into isolable pieces, entirely separate from context,

[169] CJ, Section IX of the Introduction, Ak. 195, p. 35.
[170] Roger S. Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism: The Inside of Things* (Lanham and Boulder, 2016), p. 9.

which deliver a quantifiable 'value,' the agreement of the listener that can be measured as the pleasure of a positive response".[171] For example, during the 2008 Presidential debates, the news company CNN organized a tool that attempted to measure voters' reactions to the candidates' speeches.[172] Each individual was given a "handset" with a knob that could be turned in one direction to communicate pleasure or satisfaction and the opposite direction to indicate displeasure or dissatisfaction with the content of the speech at any particular moment.[173] Foster asserts that the most troubling aspect of this "device" is that it suggests that a political argument is "made up of discrete units that deliver a measurable value to the audience".[174] And yet, Foster argues, "[i]t is impossible to quantify the real value of a political speech that builds up a complete picture of a subject, carefully and incrementally, and addresses the viewer as a thinking being".[175] The device implies, wrongly, that experience can and should be strictly regimented and registered as a series of atomized responses.[176] Foster concludes that the practice demonstrates the "schematization of experience".[177] I discuss this particular example at length because I think that it illustrates why the sublime—if it is truly capable of fracturing subjective categories and social frameworks—remains a necessary experience: the sublime object cannot be reduced to a discrete series of moments that may be comprehended by the subject; on the contrary, the object resists the subject's attempts to absorb it into a field of a priori knowledge. In addition, the example shows that what might seem to be a private and individual experience that is controlled by reason—an individual's considered response to a political argument—is instead structured and controlled by social factors that often remain invisible. History's mediation of experience, and reflection, is at issue here.

Adorno's argument against the Kantian sublime is mostly persuasive: he casts the subject in the Kantian sublime as doing violence to nature through repressing sensibility and exalting rationality. Tom Huhn observes:

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[171] Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism*…, p. 9.
[172] Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism*…, p. 9.
[173] Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism*…, p. 9.
[174] Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism*…, p. 10.
[175] Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism*…, p. 10.
[176] Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism*…, p. 10.
[177] Foster, *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism*…, p. 10.

> The pleasure of the sublime…[is] the moment when subjectivity 'feels' itself, the moment when subjectivity becomes whole and cohesive, coherent and unitary. […] But the pleasure of the sublime is likewise the founding moment of culture….Violence and domination are the twin poles of this organization and foundation. Violence becomes necessary and hence legitimate as that dynamic according to which nature is presented as fearful in order to call forth a subjectivity whose own violence might oppose that of nature's. […] But pleasure also legitimates this elevation [the elevation of reason over nature] insofar as it shows the benefit and joy, the very sublimity of (this civilized) pleasure.[178]

In this chapter I will supplement Adorno's account. Thus, I argue that there is a redemptive feature to the Kantian subject in the sublime that Adorno does not consider, and that prefigures his own conception of the shudder (which both inherits and transforms the Kantian sublime).

Kant, in a brief passage in the third *Critique*, discusses a form of experience that allows the subject proximity to the sublime object without using reason or understanding, without repressing the material features of the object, and without attempting to use the object for the subject's own epistemic or moral goals. I call this form of experience 'poetic perception.' Kant does not detail its structure—either objectively (in terms of how it might construct the object of experience) or subjectively (in terms of how it affects the subject's own feelings or thoughts). In addition, Kant does not explain why—in a section devoted to analyzing the sublime as a mode of aesthetic experience or reception—poetic perception is figured as necessary for artistic creation (or production, in Adorno's terms). Is poetic perception connected with genius, hypotyposis, or the judgment of taste? Or is it separate from all of those experiential modes? Kant's concept of poetic perception entails that his account of sublime experience must function as a mode of artistic production—in addition to aesthetic reception. Most importantly, poetic perception may partially rescue Kant's own account of the sublime, as I detail below.

Exegesis: Kant on the Mathematically and Dynamically Sublime

[178] Huhn, 'The Kantian Sublime...', p. 274.

For Kant, objects characterized as mathematically sublime are formless; for this reason, they disrupt aesthetic reflective judgment through defeating sensibility and exalting reason.[179] In the mathematical sublime, natural objects initially appear to be counter-purposive; however, when reason corrects the failings of sensibility, the subject regains a feeling of purposive pleasure.[180]

In addition to such purposiveness, however, the experience of the sublime also unsettles the subject's feeling of harmony.[181] Kant defines that which unsettles the subject as "a feeling of the sublime," rather than a sublime object.[182] However, in his descriptions of the mathematically and the dynamically sublime, he makes clear that the object plays a significant role in disrupting the subject's experience.[183] The sublime object is "incommensurate with [the subject's] power of exhibition," which suggests that it remains an intuition that cannot be comprehended.[184] Kant also asserts that the term 'sublime' refers to a particular experience:

> ...we express ourselves entirely incorrectly when we call this or that *object of nature* sublime...for how can we call something by a term of approval if we apprehend it as in itself contrapurposive? Instead, all we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind...Thus the vast ocean heaved up by storms cannot be called sublime. The

[179] CJ, Section 25, Ak. 249-250, pp. 104-105.
[180] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 258, p. 115.
[181] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 245, p. 98.
[182] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 245, p. 99. See Peter McCormick, 'Overwhelming Forces and a Whispering Vastness: Kantian Fictions of a Negative Sublime', in Herman Parret (ed), *Kants Asthetik, Kant's Aesthetics, L'esthetique de Kant* (Berlin and New York, 1998), p. 640. He notes that Kant does not identify the cause of sublime experience. It could be either formless objects or the disruption of experience.

[183] See Allan Lazaroff, 'The Kantian Sublime: Aesthetic Judgment and Religious Feeling', in Ruth F. Chadwick and Clive Cazeaux (eds.), *Immanuel Kant: Critical Assessments, Volume IV* (4 vols, London and New York, 1992), p. 370: "Sublimity, that is, as an aesthetic quality, is an attribute of or somehow pertains directly to the object itself, just as the beautiful in Kant pertains to the object itself...the numinous is also an attribute of or pertains to the numinous object itself."
[184] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 245, p. 99.

> sight of it is horrible...the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness.[185]

Kant's principle that metaphysics as such is no longer possible (because the subject only knows objects through employing the forms of intuition, empirical concepts, and categories) entails that an object only may be considered objective when it is mediated through subjectivity. In the mathematical sublime, for instance, the representation of the object's formlessness causes the subject's faculties to fail to present the object as it appears through perception; in the dynamical sublime, phenomenal objects' force affects the subject, which causes her to become aware of her moral rationality.[186] However, aesthetic objects (both beautiful and sublime) are united through the subject's feelings, which do not denote any quality in the object itself. Kant confirms this when he remarks that the sublime "concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility."[187] For Kant, aesthetic reflective judgment necessarily involves a feeling that the object is purposive for the subject.[188] Yet if the sublime involves formlessness, how could such an experience be felt as purposive?[189] Kant appeals to reason: "the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness."[190] For Kant, the subject's reason resolves the formlessness apprehended through intuition.[191] In this way, the subject's experience of the sublime is harmonious, rather than dissonant.[192]

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[185] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 245-246, p. 99.
[186] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 252-256, pp. 108-112; Section 28, Ak. 262-264, pp. 121-123.
[187] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 245-246, p. 99.
[188] CJ, Introduction, Section VII, Ak. 189-190, pp. 28-30.
[189] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 244-245, pp. 97-98.

[190] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 246, p. 99. See also Rudolf Makkreel, 'Imagination and Temporality in Kant's Theory of the Sublime', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42 (Spring, 1984), p. 310, 313: "The moral destination disclosed in the sublime requires a more comprehensive unity of the subject that relates the theoretical and practical activities of man".
[191] CJ, Section 23, Ak. 245-246, pp. 98-99.

[192] See Rachel Zuckert, 'A New Look at Kant's Theory of Pleasure', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 60 (Summer, 2002), p. 248. "In appreciating a beautiful object, we are pleased, and we 'want' to continue appreciating that [very same] object, to

The Mathematical Sublime

Kant states that the experience of the mathematically sublime involves an object that we perceive to be "*absolutely large*."[193] The judgment involves "only a subjective standard underlying our reflective judgment about magnitude [*Grosse*]."[194] The pleasure generated in the sublime aesthetic judgment is directed at the subject, and not at the object: "this liking is by no means a liking for the object (since that may be formless), but rather a liking for the expansion of the imagination itself."[195]

In the mathematical sublime, the object of aesthetic pleasure is supersensible: the subject's capacity for theoretical comprehension.[196] The imagination cannot meet the demands of reason; hence, it exposes the limits of sensibility.[197] The imagination's failure reveals the subject's epistemic spontaneity (though not her moral freedom, which will be revealed in the dynamically sublime); thus, the experience of the sublime indirectly furthers the subject's self-knowledge and also produces the feeling of subjective purposiveness.[198] The experience of the sublime also reveals the division between the sensible and the intelligible realm.

In Section 26, Kant describes the phenomenological experience of the mathematical sublime.[199] Kant writes that, in order to perceive any object through

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remain in the state that we are in. That state, according to Kant, is 'reflection' on the object's 'form,' or (seemingly synonymously) the 'harmony of the faculties'".

[193] CJ, Section 25, Ak. 248, p. 103.

[194] CJ, Section 25, Ak. 249, p. 104.

[195] CJ, Section 25, Ak. 249, p. 105. See Patricia M. Matthews, 'Kant's Sublime: A Form of Pure Aesthetic Reflective Judgment', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54 (Spring, 1996), p. 171. She argues that the judgment of the sublime involves reflective disinterested contemplation: "Imagination strives to illustrate this idea of reason with its manifold. Imagination needs the idea of reason as a goal toward which it is striving, but it can never achieve comprehension because it can never completely illustrate the idea of the infinite as a totality. The effect is that imagination and reason *remain in a state of reflection*."

[196] CJ, Section 25, Ak. 250, p. 106.

[197] CJ, Section 25, Ak. 250, p. 106.

[198] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 259-260, pp. 116-117.

[199] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 251-257, pp. 107-114.

intuition, the imagination must both apprehend and comprehend the object.[200] Apprehension involves perceiving the object as a series of discrete parts; as a result, apprehension may "progress to infinity"—for instance, perceiving a tree gradually, moving from its roots all the way up to the crown.[201] Comprehension involves grasping the object as a unified whole (seeing the tree's roots, trunk, and crown simultaneously), and "becomes more and more difficult the farther apprehension progresses".[202] The subject apprehends objects using perception, but comprehends using memory; thus, if memory cannot hold together or recollect an object, it fails: for instance, comprehending 10 redwood trees that were stacked on top of one another would be nearly impossible. Comprehension cannot grasp any object larger than "the aesthetically largest basic measure for an estimation of magnitude."[203] When the imagination fails to comprehend these objects it "sinks back into itself, but consequently comes to feel a liking [that amounts to an] emotion."[204] For Kant, the failure of the imagination is resolved by reason's success, when the formless object is grasped through a rational idea.[205]

Kant responds that the subject's reason produces an idea of "the infinite as *a whole*," which proves that the subject's supersensible capacity transcends any sensible criteria or "standard."[206] Kant does not explain exactly how this transition occurs, or why the imagination would attempt to carry out a task that it cannot fulfill; but he suggests that the failure of imagination leads inevitably to the success of reason.[207]

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[200] CJ, Section 26, Ak., 251-252, p. 108.
[201] CJ, Section 26, Ak., 251-252, p. 108.
[202] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 252, p. 108.
[203] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 252, p. 108.
[204] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 252, p. 109.
[205] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 252-255, pp. 108-110.
[206] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 254, p. 111. See Paul Crowther, 'The Aesthetic Domain: Locating the Sublime', *British Journal of Aesthetics,* 29 (Winter, 1989), pp. 29-30. Crowther explains that subjective purposiveness in the sublime is brought about by "a felt quantitative compatibility" between "world and cognition". Crowther's account excludes a central feature of the sublime: the feelings of frustration and anxiety that result from the overwhelming *lack* of compatibility or consonance between subject and object.
[207] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 255-256, pp. 112-113.

For Kant, feeling is not sensible: the free play of the faculties produces pleasure that is disinterested and yet aesthetic.[208] The judgment of the mathematical sublime is completed, for Kant, when reason contemplates its own power to rise above sensibility, and to grasp the object as a whole, independently of the object's material or sensible nature.[209] Reason judges the object without imagination: "But the mind feels elevated in its own judgment of itself...and finds all the might of the imagination still inadequate to reason's ideas."[210] In the closing lines of Section 26, Kant asserts that the sublime indicates the weakness of sensibility and even nature itself before the power of reason: the mathematical sublime presents "our imagination, in all its boundlessness, and along with it nature, as vanishing[ly small] in contrast to the ideas of reason, if the imagination is to provide an exhibition adequate to them."[211]

Kant remarks that the feeling of the sublime is "respect for our own vocation": namely, the subject's capacity for rational, moral legislation.[212] Kant defines respect as "the feeling that it is beyond our ability to attain to an idea *that is a law for us*."[213] In other words, the sensible aspects of the subject, which have no contact with the supersensible, have respect for those rational ideas that they must carry out, and yet cannot reach. The imagination exemplifies this process when it tries to exhibit a rational idea, and discovers that its power of comprehension is limited compared to reason's power of thought.[214]

Reason's success strengthens the "*whole vocation*" of the subject.[215] In short, although the feeling that accompanies the mathematical sublime is one of "displeasure," the subject presents such displeasure as "purposive."[216] Kant adds: "What makes this

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[208] See Crowther, 'The Aesthetic Domain…', p. 29. He maintains that judgments of the sublime are disinterested because they do not distinguish between a real and an illusory object. See also Matthews, 'Kant's Sublime…', pp. 165-180.
[209] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 256-257, pp. 112-113.
[210] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 256, p. 113.
[211] CJ, Section 26, Ak. 257, pp. 113-114.
[212] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 257, p. 114.
[213] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 257, p. 114.
[214] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 257-258, pp. 114-115.
[215] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 259, p. 116.
[216] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 259, p. 116.

possible is that the subject's own inability uncovers in him the consciousness of an unlimited ability which is also his."[217] That is, the shortcomings of sensibility refer to reason's capacity for constructing ideas.[218]

The failure of the imagination is not only its inability to comprehend a nearly infinite manifold, or the fact that it inflicts violence on the forms of intuition when it attempts such comprehension. Rather, Kant suggests that imagination's failure concerns the fact that it can never become truly independent of sensibility—that is, imagination may never attain to reason's powers. Kant closes his analysis of the mathematical sublime by arguing that the imagination's limitations are redeemed because they allow the subject to transcend her sensibility and to realize her true supersensible nature through reason.[219]

The Dynamically Sublime

In Section 28, entitled "On Nature as a Might," Kant begins his analysis of the "Dynamically Sublime In Nature".[220] In a judgment of the dynamically sublime, Kant says, "we consider nature as a might that has no dominance over us."[221] In the experience of the dynamically sublime, the subject becomes aware of her supersensible freedom.[222] As a consequence, the subject becomes aware of the difference between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. Kant describes the experience of perceiving nature in its chaos (that is, nature that appears to threaten the moral and epistemic projects of human beings), which eventually reveals the divide between nature and freedom:

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[217] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 259, p. 116.

[218] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 259, p. 116. See Rachel Zuckert, 'Awe or Envy: Herder contra Kant on the Sublime', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 61 (Summer, 2003), p. 222. She argues that Herder's account of the sublime is preferable to Kant's because it involves empirical, and not only rational, cognition: "Herder's more elastic and incremental account of sublime experience seems preferable to Kant's exclusionary account: Herder allows that we may find something awe-inspiring when we know little about it (or see it as the 'poets' do), *and* that we may find it awe-inspiring (potentially even more so) when we have come to understand it better."

[219] CJ, Section 27, Ak. 259-260, pp. 116-117.

[220] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 260, p. 119.

[221] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 260, p. 119.

[222] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 121-123.

> [C]onsider bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightning and thunderclaps, volcanoes with all their destructive power...Compared to the might of any of these, our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle...And we like to call these objects sublime because they...allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind, and which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence.[223]

For Kant, the experience of the dynamically sublime allows the subject to realize that her nature contains two different and conflicting elements: the phenomenal and the noumenal.[224] The subject's reason presents a method of judging nature grounded in the supersensible: "For although we found our own limitation when we considered the immensity of nature...yet we also found, in our power of reason, a different and nonsensible standard...we found in our mind a superiority over nature itself in its immensity...."[225] Reason, in the dynamically sublime, is sovereign; sensibility and external nature are both merely heteronomous.[226] Kant separates nature and reason, which is necessary from his point of view if the subject is to be capable of autonomy and rationality.[227] Subjects often (mistakenly) attribute sublimity to features of the natural world. Since natural objects may elicit the subject's power of reason, and consequently her capacity for moral legislation, they remain the starting point of the sublime judgment; however, Kant maintains that only the subject's mind may be considered truly sublime.[228]

The dynamically sublime reveals the sharp contrast between nature and freedom that Kant attempts to bridge through reflective judgment. The sublime also reveals certain

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[223] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 261, p. 120.
[224] See Lazaroff, 'The Kantian Sublime…'. He argues that the dynamical sublime involves religious feeling. As a result for him the true 'sublime object' is a rational idea—not a natural object. Lazaroff's appeal to religious feeling results from the desire to transcend the concrete problems of the world into another purified realm. Yet the Kantian sublime, as I understand it, tries to describe the divorce between transcendence and immanence. Thus Lazaroff's appeal deepens, rather than resolves, the problem that the sublime presents.
[225] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 261-262, pp. 120-121.
[226] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 261-262, pp. 120-121.
[227] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 261-262, pp. 120-121.
[228] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 264, p. 123.

contradictions that threaten the order of his system. For example, the experience of the sublime is an aesthetic experience, yet one that gives the subject cognitive awareness (only negatively) of a realm that lies wholly beyond the sensible. Although Kant strictly refuses metaphysical speculation, his description of the sublime sometimes appears to be an example of purely speculative experience. I depart from those commentators who maintain that the third *Critique* does not attempt to transcend the limits of the first *Critique*, and that Kant does not attempt to answer metaphysical questions in his aesthetic theory.[229] Aesthetic feeling, the central category of aesthetic reflective judgment, is sensible, and yet also universal and necessary; in this way, it seems to bridge the divide between the three faculties. In the final lines of Section 28, Kant notes that the experience of sublimity allows the subject awareness of her own noumenal freedom.[230]

> Hence sublimity is contained not in any thing of nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of our superiority to nature within us, and thereby also to nature outside us (as far as it influences us). Whatever arouses this feeling in us, and this includes the might of nature that challenges our forces, is then (although improperly) called sublime.[231]

The dynamic sublime remains the subject's aesthetic awareness of the supersensible within her. The supersensible is the ground for the subject's autonomy, which marks her as irreducibly distinct from sensible nature. The subject's realization that her noumenal self remains superior to nature, Kant maintains, arises when her phenomenal self is threatened by external nature. One might wonder whether the threat (or perhaps the seduction) of internal nature might also cause an experience of the dynamically sublime.

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[229] Peter Fenves argues: "The feeling of sublimity, according to Kant, may indicate something about the 'destination' (*Bestimmung*) of the human mind, and this interpretation of the sublime feeling doubtless gives an impetus to renewed metaphysical speculation, but it also, and perhaps more importantly, runs counter to this very same impulse. For the feeling of sublimity is only a feeling, not a secure basis for knowledge, not even knowledge of the self." See Peter Fenves, 'Taking Stock of the Kantian Sublime', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 65-66.
[230] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 264, p. 123.
[231] CJ, Section 28, Ak. 264, p. 123.

If so, the subject would legislate to her heteronomous material self and thereby corral her immoral inclinations through freedom.

If a judgment about the sublime is to be universal and necessary, and not particular or contingent, then it must originate in the subject's most elementary "predisposition[s]," which are not affected by empirical phenomena.[232] A judgment of the sublime "has its foundation in human nature: in something that, along with common sense, we may require and demand of everyone, namely, the predisposition to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to moral feeling."[233] Aesthetic judgments' modality—their status as universal and necessary—must be presupposed in order for their judgments to be considered pure. Aesthetic judgments' status as universal, Kant claims, allows them to transcend any experience that is grounded in empirical interests.[234] In conclusion, in the mathematically sublime, the imagination cannot apprehend the object; in the dynamically sublime, the imagination has no power over the object.[235]

Kantian Poetic Perception

With this brief background discussion of the Kantian sublime, we can examine the concept of poetic perception, which arises out of the problem of how the subject relates to an object that exceeds her powers. This problem is accentuated in modern aesthetics due to historical experience, which breaks apart the traditional category of the sublime.[236] In order to retain aesthetic judgment's purity, Kant introduces the concept of what I will call poetic perception.[237] However, this concept is not elaborated in detail.[238]

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[232] CJ, Section 29, Ak. 265, p. 125.
[233] CJ, Section 29, Ak. 265, p. 125.
[234] CJ, Section 29, Ak. 265-266, p. 125.
[235] CJ, 'General Comment…', Ak. 268, pp. 127-128.

[236] Ray, 'Reading the Lisbon…', p. 1. "That Auschwitz is sublime...In the extremity of its violence, in its intractable core of incomprehensibility, and in its fateful legacy for the future, this massively traumatic genocidal catastrophe marks a radical break in historical consciousness...After this disaster, human-inflicted disaster will remain more threatening, more sublime, than any natural disaster."
[237] CJ, 'General Comment…', Ak. 270, p. 130.
[238] Various commentators have grappled with poetic perception. For instance, Rachel Zuckert discusses the concept of the sublime in Herder and in Kant. See Zuckert, 'Awe or Envy…', p. 222.

The concept of poetic perception is elaborated in the following passage from the third *Critique*:

> Therefore, when we call the sight of the starry sky *sublime*, we must not base our judgment upon any concepts of worlds that are inhabited by rational beings, and then [conceive of] the bright dots that we see occupying the space above us as being these worlds' suns, moved in orbits prescribed for them with great purposiveness; but we must base our judgment regarding it merely on how we see it, as a vast vault encompassing everything, and merely under this presentation may we posit the sublimity that a pure aesthetic judgment attributes to this object. In the same way, when we judge the sight of the ocean we must not do so on the basis of how we *think* it, enriched with all sorts of knowledge which we possess (but which is not contained in the direct intuition), e.g., as a vast realm of aquatic creatures...for all such judgments will be teleological. Instead we must be able to view the ocean as poets do, merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye—e.g., if we observe it while it is calm, as a clear mirror of water bounded only by the sky; or, if it is turbulent, as being like an abyss threatening to engulf everything—and yet find it sublime.[239]

The above passage on poetic perception unsettles Kant's previous account of the sublime, which had confirmed the subject's sovereignty over nature through her ability to overcome the contingency and strangeness of that which remains unable to be judged conclusively. In contrast, poetic perception seems to involve distancing oneself from determinative judgment, in order to allow the mind to associate various images together that might evoke or present the object. Sweet notes that the sublime object causes the subject to feel frustration because her powers of presentation fall short; in contrast, poetic perception seems to rely on a certain indeterminacy present in the nature of the image itself.[240] Although such perception involves avoiding theoretical knowledge, which, Kant implies, might cloud the subject's freedom to associate, poetic perception is not wholly non-cognitive, because it clearly involves reflecting upon the object's various appearances. For Kant, poetic perception enables aesthetic judgment's disinterested

[239] CJ, 'General Comment…', Ak. 270, p. 130.
[240] Sweet, 'Reflection…', pp. 59-60.

nature; I argue instead, below, that poetic perception should remain resolutely materialistic if it is to present an account that does justice to the object. Some might argue that Kantian poetic perception remains wholly consistent with his account of reflective disinterested contemplation—which does not involve theoretical or practical knowledge—because the poet must apparently perceive an object merely in visual terms (stripped of background knowledge, cultural or historical influences, private prejudice or interest, etc.). However, I think that Kant transgresses his principle that poetic perception is a kind of visual perception that represents objects as they literally appear (through determinative judgment). In the passage above, Kant claims that the poet must view an object "merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye"; however, Kant then creates several metaphors (for instance, "vast vault," "clear mirror," "abyss") that describe what poets actually do: namely, produce comparisons and associations in order to construct a constellation of concepts that evoke and work through, rather than avoid, historical and social knowledge.[241] These metaphors are not neutral or value-free. In the end, what Kant claims to be doing is not what he is actually doing.

What Kant actually suggests is that poetic perception involves relating to an object in terms of its potential for metaphorical thought: the subject must attempt to respond to the object in a manner that it not merely literal or reductive; instead, she must try to see the object as *more* than it really is.[242] This process involves freedom or spontaneity, which brings the concept of poetic perception close to Kantian genius. In poetic perception, the subject must see the object as it relates to, and is reflected in, other objects and relations. Kant insists: "we must base our judgment regarding it [the night sky] merely on how we see it, as a vast vault encompassing everything…".[243] Kant asserts that the poet sees the object without conceptual or moral interests—that is, non-purposively, or non-teleologically. In this way, for Kant, the poet's vision is clear, because her perception cleanses objects of their material and sensuous contingency, in order to arrive at a priori artistic experience. At the same time, the poet's perception,

[241] CJ, 'General Comment…', Ak. 270, p. 130.
[242] AT, p. 417.
[243] CJ, 'General Comment…', Ak. 270, p. 130.

which Kant constructs as naïve, enables her to think more broadly about the object's significance.

Poetic perception also proves that historical and social consciousness of the object is part of aesthetic and artistic experience—although Kant aims to prohibit such consciousness from any role in transcendental idealism. Kant's attempt to purify poetic perception should be viewed with caution because without the historical aspect of experience, key cultural tropes and figures cannot be identified as part of a social and cultural context; as a result, they cannot be properly morally evaluated, because they are misleadingly assumed to be merely abstract, indeterminate, or neutral terms that exist in a void. Kant presents his metaphors as if they were spontaneously perceived and therefore autonomous from history. For example, Kant's metaphor of the ocean as a mirror clearly has historical and cultural roots that are not explored or unraveled. The ocean's unknown fathoms must have terrified sailors and merchants in the age of Enlightenment (which was arguably in decline when Kant wrote the third *Critique*), and its seemingly infinite distance at least partially fueled the drive to conquer unknown lands and to tame exotic cultures in the ideological imagination. As a consequence of the highly speculative maps that were drawn of the seas in the 18th Century, the ocean possibly was considered to be most calming and beautiful when it simply reflected the source of humanity's mythological and divine hopes: the sky. The heavens have long been the domain of the gods (and humanity's highest ideals) and the depths of the sea the refuge of terrifying and mythological creatures (such as the Sirens or mermaids, which represent the animal or primal aspect of humanity). Mirrors—a symbol of subjectivity's supposed knowledge of itself—thus serve to identify what is unidentifiable. If the ocean is a mirror, then the unknown is capable of becoming known.

Poetic perception involves that which "manifests itself to the eye".[244] Kant suggests that such perception is divorced from discursive thought (which produces objective knowledge) in order to ground aesthetic judgment in transcendental structures of experience. Yet Kant's view should be amended because it does not allow philosophical thought to contribute to aesthetic or artistic experience; as a result, such experience is emptied of its critical aspect. Kant's view that the poet's naïve perception

[244] CJ, 'General Comment…', Ak. 270, p. 130.

may immediately grasp the object's varied aspects is based on a romantic view of artistic and aesthetic agency: the idea that such agency's autonomy may protect it from political and social corrosion. The latter view cannot be justified, because in modern times the subject has been thoroughly corrupted by social and cultural structures of power. Although Kant insists that aesthetic judgment is not based on concepts, or on the morally good, such judgment *must* involve cognition in some manner if it is not merely to reproduce superficially the object's characteristics (outlined in determinative judgment). Cognition allows reflection, which is necessary in order to resist the ideological or illusory dimension of the object.

Kant also seems to reverse his earlier position on sublimity. Instead of maintaining that only subjective freedom may cause sublime experience, he now argues that such experience appears in objectivity too: in natural phenomena that cannot be controlled or contained using determinative judgment. As a result, some other form of non-teleological judgment is required. This is a welcome departure from his claim that the sublime only appears in the subject's realization of her moral agency in the dynamical sublime, or that the sublime relies on ideas of reason in the mathematical sublime. Most commentators accept that the sublime is related to epistemic or moral mastery. For instance, William Desmond remarks: "I interpret Kant's view of the sublime as subordinating the excess of its transcendence to our ethical self-mediation and our moral superiority".[245] And Paul Crowther writes that, in the dynamical sublime, the subject is able to conceptualize sensuous objects that would otherwise overwhelm her; it is this ability, he claims, that causes the subject's feeling of pleasure in the dynamical sublime.[246]

Poetic perception diversifies the subject's experience of the object by examining its connection with other objects, and its social-historical expression; and it enters the object and describes it on its own terms. Yet how could such a description be possible unless another, wholly expressive, language exists that is unrelated to communicative language? How could such discursive tools help subjects to enter the object immanently?

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[245] William Desmond, 'Kant and the Terror of Genius: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism', in Herman Parret (ed), *Kant's Asthetik, Kant's Aesthetics, L'esthetique de Kant* (Berlin and New York, 1998), pp. 613, note 4.
[246] See Crowther, 'The Aesthetic Domain…', p. 28.

In other to answer these questions, we need to look closely at what a new concept of poetic perception would look like, and we need to examine why such perception transcends reflective judgment. Examining what occurs empirically when a poet constructs an image may help us to reflect upon what should happen in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment. A brief exploration of how poetic perception might be revised will accomplish two things: first, it will demonstrate how truth content may be salvaged from Kant's account; second, it will anticipate the next chapter, in which we explore how Adorno's concept of the shudder inherits the Kantian sublime.

A New Concept of Poetic Perception

"The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass."[247]

Poetic perception starts with the subject's observations about an object. Yet, an observation must be tried and tested by the subject's capacities for reflection, feeling, somatic impulse, and reason if it is to become objective. Thus, poetic perception should not be understood as an intuitive or immediate act. Instead, it involves thinking about materiality through somatic realization or feeling, which expresses how the object's various points of reference have developed.

Further, in poetic perception, the subject must be receptive to those aspects of the object that she does not immediately understand. This is why poetic perception has an affinity with listening, and hence constitutes a form of mimetic comportment. Andrew Bowie observes that interpretation, because it is mimetic, does not involve cognitive mastery: "The essential point is that interpretation is not just a matter of knowing how to do it in a technical sense [...] The 'telos of cognition' would in these terms be the ability to unify the general categories of thought with the particularity inherent in any specific

[247] MM, p. 50.

object of thought."[248] Similarly, it is through receptivity that poetic perception remains oriented to materiality and sensuousness.

In addition, poetic perception involves discovering lyrical echoes in the object: that is, objective associations unearthed by the subject that express the object's historical and cultural context and its development. It is important to pay attention to the object in this way because if the subject does not follow the object's contours, aesthetic experience degenerates into a pleasurable game which is divorced from ethical reflection, and in which the subject's feelings and thoughts remain in the center. If the artwork is primarily a means for generating pleasure, then it cannot uncover truth.

Poetic perception works with images. I understand an image as an arrangement of elements (distributed either violently or non-violently) that either illuminate or unsettle some aspect of cognition. Images are necessary in order to displace the reifying force of discursive thought and communicative language, which may easily freeze or occlude certain aspects of an object in order to present it as amenable to the subject. Although images only constitute an incomplete presentation of an object's qualities, they are able to impart a sense of the particular's diverse aspects; in this way, an image may criticize cognition that fails to recognize aesthetic quality. Poetic perception's focus on images entails that the object has a certain depth that cannot be described or known conceptually, and which escapes conclusive determination—either through rational categories, or through understanding's empirical concepts. Aesthetic experience should provide a material critique of discursive thought; without such a critique, aesthetic experience is at risk of uncritically accepting philosophical categories that are assumed to be necessary, but which, upon closer inspection, reveal themselves to reproduce the worst assumptions of cultural and historical tradition. For example, we should not assume that the classical idea of beauty remains relevant after the historical atrocities of the twentieth century; instead, the meaning of beauty needs to be subject to an immanent critique that is historically and socially sensitive. Aesthetic experience is involved with images, which

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[248] Andrew Bowie, 'Interpretation and Truth: Adorno on Literature and Music', in *Adorno and Literature*, p. 51.

employ concepts and discursive thought, but which are without instrumental goals. These images expand the subject's cognitive field—that is, her conception of the object and its varied significance. In poetic perception, the subject explores what may be called the object's resonance. Objective resonance involves subjective association; reflection; the history of the object; the materiality of the object; the object's social context; other particulars that illuminate aspects of the object.

Poetic perception also differs from reflective judgment. Reflective judgment uncovers the similarities between particulars in order to form a unifying concept that synthesizes them.[249] While such judgment may be necessary in order to gather knowledge for practical use, or for theoretical cognition, it is inappropriate for aesthetic experience, which requires a non-violent method of gathering material, and one that adapts completely to its object. Poetic perception uncovers the *differences* between particulars, and exposes the fractures that compose any particular—that which cause it to diverge from any system of classification. Hence, particulars poetically perceived are able to shatter or unsettle any attempt at synthesis, unification, or assimilation.[250] As a result, poetic perception is unable to view particulars as mere matter for theoretical cognition or instrumental-pragmatic action.

Finally, poetic perception is not simply identical to philosophical thought. Poetic perception prepares the ground for such thought by allowing the subject to gather material that may provoke and incite philosophical reflection. In addition, poetic perception uses language in a way that transcends communication; poetic language is evocative, imaginative, generative of imaginative association, difficult to understand immediately, and expressive of historical suffering and social disorder. Yet, like philosophy, poetic perception must be critical if it is to avoid merely reproducing the

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[249] See Hannah Ginsborg, 'Reflective Judgment and Taste', *Nous*, 24 (March, 1990), p. 66; Sweet, 'Reflection…', p. 55; A. C. Genova, 'Kant's Complex Problem of Reflective Judgement', in Ruth F. Chadwick and Clive Cazeaux (eds), *Immanuel Kant: Critical Assessments: Volume IV* (4 vols, London and New York, 1992), pp. 55-58.

[250] Peter Osborne, 'Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism: The Problem of a 'Postmodern' Art,' in Simon Jarvis (ed), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume IV* (4 vols, London and New York, 2007), p. 59; Hohendahl, 'Nature and the Autonomy…', p. 252.

dominant and ideological motifs that circulate through hegemonic culture and which threaten to destroy autonomy. To be critical is to retain a certain distance between subject and object.

Poetic Perception and the Problems of the Kantian Sublime

There are several features of the Kantian sublime that Adorno cannot accept. Poetic perception may resolve or at least alleviate some of these issues. Through a critical engagement with tradition, Adorno hopes to rescue historical experience.

In the Kantian sublime, the subject does not fully engage with otherness (that is, difference, materiality, nature, or nonidentity).[251] The subject experiences otherness as a disruptive force, evidenced in the subject's empirical fear in the face of nature, and in reason's reaction to imagination's inability to present objectivity. Albrecht Wellmer states that, for Adorno, in the experience of the sublime, the aesthetic subject must sustain an experience of negativity: "Modern art is the remembrance of nature in the subject, tied to the strength of a subject which [sic] is capable of sustaining the experience of its own finitude as spirit".[252] Kant claims that, in order to protect autonomous agency, and reason's mastery over nature, the subject must reflect upon her own freedom—which is purely spontaneous and self-identical. For Kant, freedom and nature must exist in wholly separate domains. In the sublime, freedom's repulsion of nature occurs when imagination is superseded by reason, and when reflection upon the subject's moral agency occurs through reason alone. Further, the metaphysical picture assumed by Kant in the third *Critique* is that objectivity cannot constitute subjectivity, because objectivity has no agency of its own, apart from that imparted to it by subjectivity; although objectivity may bring about reflective judgment, it remains powerless to affect the subject's capacity to judge. For this reason, subjects are viewed as capable of bestowing aesthetic, practical, and epistemological meaning, and objects are viewed as the empty bearers of such meaning.

[251] Huhn, 'The Kantian Sublime…'.
[252] Wellmer, 'Adorno, Modernity…', p. 122.

Why is the Kantian conception of freedom ethically unacceptable, philosophically problematic, and repressive? Karsten Fischer writes that Adorno follows Freud in drawing out the social consequences of the domination of nature: "the internalized violent domination of nature also facilitates the use of force in social life. Adorno's hypothesis with regard to a psychology of civilization means that man's brute force against nature encourages him to use violence against other human beings as well."[253] In addition, for Kant, the subject must falsify her own internal composition: the subject's freedom is not wholly autonomous; we must overcome internal strife as our agency develops.[254] Kant's definition of freedom implies that the subject cannot recognize the material or natural elements of her self. In addition, Kant's view, which pits subjectivity against objectivity, results in the reification or stultification of both poles—neither may affect the other. Such an account fails to explain how freedom affects nature at all, as Kant acknowledges in the introduction to the third *Critique*. Lastly, Kant's conception of freedom retains primacy over nature, and hence seeks to control objectivity.[255] Kant would probably respond that, if that moral judgment is to avoid corruption through empirical contingency (such as natural desires, animal inclinations, emotions, historical mediation, and social prejudice), freedom must remain autonomous from nature. While freedom should of course be distinguished from nature, the two poles are not as distinct as Kant would like. For freedom is historically and socially conditioned, and moral action must engage with natural instincts, rather than repressing them; to view freedom as an absolute force in the subject is to adopt a theological postulate that cannot be defended without relapsing into faith. Furthermore, Kant's view of nature as a system driven by empty mechanical causality should be challenged: those aspects of the subject or the empirical world that

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[253] Karsten Fischer, 'In the Beginning Was the Murder: Destruction of Nature and Interhuman Violence in Adorno's Critique of Culture', *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 6 (Spring, 2005), p. 27.

[254] See Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects…', p. 66; Stark, 'The Dignity…', pp. 65-66; O'Connor, 'Freedom Within Nature…'; Drucilla Cornell, 'The Ethical Message of Negative Dialectics', in Simon Jarvis (ed) *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume II* (4 vols, London and New York, 2007), p. 390.

[255] See Genova, 'Kant's Complex Problem…', p. 71; Klaus Dusing, 'Beauty as the Transition from Nature to Freedom in Kant's *Critique of Judgment'*, *Nous*, 24 (March, 1990), pp. 79-92; Desmond, 'Kant and the Terror…'.

appear as most 'natural' in fact contain elements of action, agency, choice, freedom, and responsiveness.

Historical events and social pressures contribute to—and even construct— the material that is considered either acceptable or unacceptable for philosophical consideration, unconscious processing, everyday reflection, or artistic production. The virulent nationalism and class warfare that defined the First World War and its aftermath arguably strengthened the natural desire for self-preservation, which was repressed and then returned with renewed strength, and the fear of difference, which becomes greater as the subject desires to control objectivity.[256] The result of such nationalism and racism was that, among certain radical left-wing intellectuals, and Marxists, the authority of rationality—which in earlier centuries was unquestioned—started to wane.[257] If human subjects all possessed reason, and all could potentially become enlightened or intelligent, how could European nations have fallen so quickly into such a deadly war? Ian Kershaw observes, "The military dead [of WWI] totaled almost 9 million, the civilian dead (largely caused by mass deportation, famine and disease) close to 6 million. Taking all the belligerents together, as many as 7 million combatants had been captured by the enemy and sometimes spent years in prisoner-of-war camps…".[258] In the face of such mass slaughter, some individuals concluded that reason had become irrational, and had gone dangerously off course. Traditional cultural values (such as rationality, virtue, honor, faith, or brotherhood) no longer seemed neutral; instead, they seemed part of a malignant tradition that could not be returned to.[259] Yet Adorno maintains that tradition may be given force when its terms are redefined (through determinate negation). For instance, the sublime should not be wholly rejected (even if it were possible to do so). Rather, some of its terms should be criticized—in order to call forth a different perspective, and a utopian, emancipatory potential. With this focus, let us now return to Kantian poetic perception.

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[256] Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914-1949* (New York and London, 2015).
[257] Kershaw, *To Hell and Back…*
[258] Kershaw, *To Hell and Back…*, p. 91.
[259] Kershaw, *To Hell and Back...*

Poetic perception allows the subject to experience the object's contingency and its internal contradictions or inconsistencies—briefly, those elements in the object which fracture its concept, and which threaten to disunify the subject's experience of particularity. Hence it reveals another way of experiencing nature. Poetic perception also defines freedom differently from Kant's conception: it forces subjects to view objects as harboring agency, diversity, and authority, through allowing subjects to see the depth and qualitative complexity of an object, and the object's capacity to affect subjects. Finally, poetic perception inspires a variety of reflection that aims at exploration rather than mastery.

A further issue with the Kantian sublime is that it allows imagination a merely derivative role in the context of aesthetic experience; the faculty of imagination is shown to be powerless, because it may only interpret that which understanding or reason has already pre-formed. One might respond that imagination is capable of synthesis on Kant's account, and thus must have some agency; however, the agency required to synthesize material is not based in freedom, but rather in compulsion, because understanding forces sensibility to carry out processes of formalization. The latter view of imagination is demonstrated when Kant observes that imagination falls short before difference, because it cannot grasp an object as a totality.

In contrast to Kant, I contend that poetic perception is an indirect or oblique method of seeing and interpreting objects, because an object is viewed and interpreted through several other objects. As such, it is dependent upon imagination, which is capable of a more fluid, flexible, and sensual cognition—based on what Adorno calls mimetic comportment. For this reason, poetic perception may shed light on particularly difficult and obscure objects, or those that have become damaged by history, culture, or prejudice, or reified through misuse, overuse, or the deadening force of habit; in this way, imaginative poetic perception may briefly break through tradition, and awaken the powers of the new.

Finally, poetic perception may even bring out the redemptive value in Kant's account of the sublime. Above I attempted to reformulate such perception in order to reveal its truth content, which appears in the following aspects. First, poetic perception allows the subject to gain closeness to the object's particular qualities through

imaginatively associating those qualities with other objects or ideas (through the use of figures of speech such as metaphor or simile). Second, such perception allows the subject to use language and conceptual cognition in a more open and free manner, through engaging with an object on its own terms, and towards non-practical ends. Third, the manner in which the subject perceives is a radical composite of a) imaginative receptivity (as the subject does not attempt to determine the object of experience) and b) reflective spontaneity (as the subject associates images or thoughts which might evoke the object's complex materiality).[260] Fourth, such perception allows consciousness of objective historical and social experience (in addition to the poet's personal psychological associations). Poetic perception differs from identifying conceptualization or determinative judgment because it does not seek to fix the object in a classificatory system, or to establish the subject as an agent capable of imposing identity; rather, the object itself is viewed as expressing its own *agency*, which becomes evident as the object unsettles and revitalizes the subject's faculties. For instance, Martin Seel notes that Adorno's concept of contemplation carries a strong ethical demand with it.[261] For Adorno, "an unreserved receptiveness...forms the centre of a moral attitude...a theoretical, ethical and aesthetic unfolding...[in which] a recognition of the particular is made possible, which, at the same time regards it with respect and allows it to come into appearance in the fullness of its presence".[262] Such receptivity gains in value after two world wars, in which the agency of the subject has been distorted and placed in the service of harming nature. Instead of administering means, the subject should listen to that which supposedly requires categorization and synthesis.

If we re-orient Kant's account of poetic perception in order to grant the concept redemptive value, we achieve a more complicated view of the sublime. Poetic perception partially resolves the deficiencies mentioned above: it may transform the hierarchy of the faculties, and is capable of neutralizing the implicit violence that occurs when the subject attempts to define the object independently of its own autonomous expression. Perception

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[260] Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*…, p. 116.

[261] Martin Seel, 'Adorno's Contemplative Ethics', translated by Angus Nicholls, *Critical Horizons*, 5 (2004), pp. 263.

[262] Seel, 'Adorno's Contemplative…', p. 263.

is able to accomplish this through reversing the sense of failure that the subject feels after imagination fails to present meaning: instead of feeling frustrated when the attempted unification or comprehension of the object collapses, poetic perception allows the subject to remain open to the various, indeterminate, and different strands that divide the object, and which call for various thoughts, experiences, feelings, histories, and contexts in order for full experience to occur. Full experience does not mean closed or complete experience, because no totalizing view of the object is possible; nevertheless, the subject may gain proximity to the object as she realizes its distance—and its alienated and divided nature.

In addition, poetic perception forces us to realize that sublime experience may occur during artistic experience, and not only during aesthetic reception. In this way, the conventional view of the sublime—in which an aesthetic subject experiences the sublime through realizing her agency and moral obligation—is shown to be only partially true. Why does this correction matter to Kantian aesthetics as a whole? If artistic experience is potentially sublime, then it cannot be wholly active or spontaneous; in this way, we may criticize the Kantian-Romantic concept of the inspired genius (and the hierarchy of nature and freedom). The category of perception emphasizes that artistic activity is primarily receptive, and not inventive or productive. In addition to a measure of spontaneity, artistic experience also necessarily involves passivity, non-violence, patience, and self-exteriorization.

Section Two: The Shudder: Adorno's Critique of the Kantian Sublime[263]

Now that we have examined the Kantian sublime, and the reasons why it should be recovered and transformed, let us examine Adorno's concept of the shudder.[264] The shudder shocks the subject in aesthetic experience—thus forcing her to encounter nonidentity. I believe that the shudder may best be conceived as a modified version of Kantian spontaneity. In this way, the shudder demonstrates that we require a new concept of spontaneity that is sensitive to historical suffering and the nature within subjectivity. Thus the Adornian shudder criticizes the Kantian sublime, and reveals the historical sediment that accrues to the latter aesthetic category, proving it to be ethically unjustifiable.

This section is divided into three parts. First, I discuss the central contradiction of the shudder: although the phenomenon of the shudder appears to be archaic and somatic, Adorno's aesthetics requires the subject to be capable of comprehending objectivity critically—through philosophical rationality. The shudder's irrationality is potentially dangerous; however, it is also capable of cutting reason free from its static operation, which has become entrenched due to historical events. Second, I discuss the historical conditions that affect our reception of the Kantian sublime, and which Adorno responds to in his description of the aesthetic shudder. Third, I argue that the shudder responds to, and inherits, Kant's theory of spontaneity in the sublime. I turn to the sublime because it demonstrates the traditional moment inherent in Adorno's new category. The sublime calls for critical retrieval: its violent and repressive aspects need to be amended; however,

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[263] I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for the *British Journal of Aesthetics* whose editorial comments on an earlier draft of this section were very helpful.

[264] Adorno uses two different German terms for 'the shudder': *Erschutterung* and *Schauer*. The former word has various meanings: physical tremor or vibration (as in an earthquake), convulsion, traumatic breakdown, concussion, or shock (both physical and psychological). Hence the term *Erschutterung* is associated with both objective and subjective experience. The latter term, *Schauer*, might be translated as shudder, shiver, or thrill. Hence it is associated with cold and with fear: with both physical and emotional experience (see en.langenscheidt.com/german-english). See Theodor W. Adorno, *Asthetische Theorie,* Herausgegeben von Rolf Tiedemann unter Mitwirkung von Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss und Klaus Schultz, *Gesammelte Schriften, Band 7*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003.

Kant's concept of spontaneity may be retained if it is subject to historical negation. A new concept of spontaneity may help us to solve Adorno's aporia: namely, the fact that the shudder seems to be an involuntary reaction, which conflicts with Adorno's demand that aesthetic experience retain its cognitive and reflective ground in rationality.

The shudder appears to be a spontaneous or immediate reaction to nature. As such it does not involve conventional, Enlightenment rationality, although such spontaneity is a condition for rational, philosophical thought, which must involve a moment of involuntary and free receptivity before the unknown. Thus the shudder is the first part of the two-stage process of the subject's gradual awakening, through aesthetic experience, to nonidentity. The necessary second stage of such awakening involves philosophical reflection upon the receptivity of the shudder and its material content (repressed nature and history). Thus the shudder is poised on a knife-edge between regression to immediacy (mimetic lostness in the whole) and the awareness of mediation (which involves critical cognition), which occurs in and through the shudder. Without the shudder, reason would have no impetus or motivation to question its own instrumental practices, and it would not experience the suffering or harm of objectivity. Thus the shudder has a dual role: it both guards against abstract representation and it guides reason through its own history of violence, and the suffering of objects. We might compare the shudder to Andre Breton's concept of automatic writing, which places the subject in an involuntary and trance-like state in order to reveal the damage inflicted by rationality, and the inexhaustible nature of her unconscious. In the same way, the shudder exposes the subject to the overflowing impulses of her nature, and its historical trajectory, and teaches her reason to carefully follow those impulses—instead of blindly controlling them.

> Under patient contemplation artworks begin to move. To this extent they are truly afterimages of the primordial shudder in the age of reification; the terror of that age is recapitulated via reified objects. […] Because the shudder is past and yet survives, artworks objectivate it as its afterimage. For if at one time human beings in their powerlessness against nature feared the shudder as something real, the fear is no less intense, no less justified, that the shudder will dissipate. All enlightenment is accompanied by the anxiety that what set enlightenment in

> motion in the first place and what enlightenment ever threatens to consume may disappear: truth.[265]

In this passage, Adorno describes the shudder as a "primordial" reaction: namely, the subject's "terror" before uncontrollable nature.[266] Such terror is a pre-rational response to otherness: Adorno is referring to a time, in pre-history, before reason was fully capable of dominating objects through discursive concepts and categories. The shudder names the experience of objectivity before the subject was capable of mastering nature. Yet, since we may occasionally experience the shudder in modern art, it must be a force that breaks through, or undermines, instrumental rationality. At the same time, the shudder is also vulnerable—it is in danger of becoming reified, and thus disappearing, as reason abstracts from sensuousness. This is why Adorno argues that, since artworks participate in Enlightenment, the shudder is an afterimage—that is, it is a historical phenomenon that appears ghost-like, due to the repressive effects of instrumental rationality; this is why the shudder is "remembered" rather than present.[267] At the same time, however, the shudder reappears in the modern subject's interaction with objectivity.

In Adorno's account, the hegemony achieved by rationality over nature—or totalizing demythologization—represses the shudder, in order to extirpate sensuousness and materiality from the subject's experience. Thus we can interpret the shudder as a pre-historic phenomenon that reappears in artworks and experiences that succeed in challenging the abstracting and reifying mechanisms of rationality: in which materiality briefly resists subsumption.

> If through the demythologization of the world consciousness freed itself from the ancient shudder, that shudder is permanently reproduced in the historical antagonism of subject and object. The object became as incommensurable to experience, as foreign and frightening, as mana once was.[268]

If consciousness apparently freed itself from qualitative experience as Enlightenment tightened its grip, that experience always threatens to return and haunt the subject whenever nonidentity appears—that is, whenever the subject acknowledges that

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[265] AT, p. 106.
[266] AT, p. 106.
[267] AT, p. 106.
[268] AT, pp. 110-111.

concepts' attempts to control objectivity fails. The reappearance of fear signals the reappearance of materiality. Thus subjects felt the shudder most strongly in the pre-historic era that preceded the Enlightenment. Their efforts to control this fear through magical rituals and rites reflect early forms of domination that gradually developed into different forms, such as the scientific method and concepts that abstracted from objective qualities. The shudder is an "ancient" and irrational phenomenon that demonstrates the subject's immediate, natural, and somatic reaction to otherness—a reaction that is effectively divorced from rationality.[269] Rationality feels threatened by the shudder, and wishes to brutally repress it, because instrumental reason is unable to recognize itself in the shudder, which presents materiality that has been stripped of any concepts or categories that might serve to contain or control it. Of course, since instrumental reason regresses to nature, philosophical reflection ought to recognize that the shudder is present in experience, since the shudder presents the violence of material nature. Such recognition through philosophical reflection, if it occurs in modern artworks or in experiences that present particularity, would cause instrumental reason to recoil from the true image of itself as driven by instincts and cruelty, resulting in an equally violent act of repression.

The shudder is essentially a natural reaction to otherness that eventually appears either in aesthetic experience (through sublimation), or in experiences of materiality (when the force of materiality overcomes reason's capacity for repression). In both cases, we experience a dramatization of reason's pre-history.

> Rather, this shock is the moment in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken. The recipients lose their footing; the possibility of truth, embodied in the aesthetic image, becomes tangible. This immediacy…is a function of mediation, of penetrating and encompassing experience [*Erfahrung*]; it takes shape in the fraction of an instant, and for this the whole of consciousness is required, not isolated stimuli and responses.[270]

[269] AT, pp. 110-111.
[270] AT, p. 319.

The physicality, power, and magical appearance of the shudder are all evident in this passage. The shudder is able to cancel repression because it effectively puts the subject's ego, and her capacity for rational determination, out of action; further, the shudder enacts a certain violence ("the moment of being shaken") that seems to overturn instrumental rationality's utilitarian comportment.[271] The shudder also reduces active subjects to passive "recipients" (a word that Adorno uses twice) of otherness that they cannot understand, much less control.[272] Adorno also uses the metaphor of falling ("lose their footing") to suggest that subjects descend to animal instincts, and that they feel some emotions associated with the dynamical sublime, such as fear, terror, and awe. He continues that the shudder is "immediacy [that]…is a function of mediation," which means not that only reflection is able to make sense of, and halt, the regression that the shudder provokes.[273] Of course, the shudder is not wholly immediate, because it is an historical phenomenon that only appears through artworks (and other encounters with materiality). The shudder gains in forcefulness during the twentieth century, and in our own time, because reason's irrationality has reached an extreme level. Nevertheless, as historical, it represents the moment when nature could still breach the subject's defenses—before the development of an enlightened, transcendental ego. Thus the shudder provides an image of the dialectical relationship of nature and history.

The aesthetic category of the shudder represents Adorno's attempt to come to terms with a natural and somatic reaction that is capable of undermining, and revealing the artificial mechanisms of, instrumental rationality. It is evident that Adorno, in AT, struggled with the question of how precisely the shudder functions in experience. That is, is the shudder a wholly regressive reaction, or could it be redeemed by philosophical reflection? Could the shudder be considered a mode of dialectical negation? If the shudder is merely provoked by reification, it seems likely to provoke despair. If it is provoked by difference and nonidentity, however, critical reflection might result instead.

> The aesthetic shudder once again cancels the distance held by the subject. Although artworks offer themselves to observation, they at the same time

[271] AT, p. 319.
[272] AT, p. 319.
[273] AT, p. 319.

> disorient the observer who is held at the distance of a mere spectator […] The instant of this transition is art's highest. It rescues subjectivity…by the negation of subjectivity. The subject, convulsed by art, has real experiences…these experiences are those in which the subject's petrification in his own subjectivity dissolves and the narrowness of his self-positedness is revealed.[274]

The shudder cancels distance by activating natural forces within the subject that are, in determinate judgment, and in disinterested aesthetic judgment, repressed. Adorno's assertion that the shudder rescues subjectivity through negating it suggests that he accepts a modified, non-positive, and wholly critical form of determinate negation. That is, determinate negation, for Adorno, does not entail the production of a positive pattern that develops the false, negated pattern; rather, it results in the mining of truth from untruth, or possibility from actuality.[275] The "real experiences" that the subject undergoes in the shudder are twofold. The subject feels terror in the confrontation with nature, which results in a feeling of disorientation; as a result, the subject's rational engagement with objects—driven by self-preservation and the desire to control—fails. The convulsion of the shudder produces happiness: which Adorno defines as a critical experience in which the subject becomes aware of the harmed natural stratum within herself. As the subject engages with this natural stratum, she also perceives the (future) possibility of relating to materiality in a non-violent way.[276] Happiness, for Adorno, must involve grief if it is not to culminate in an empty forgetting, or in blind conformity with the status quo.[277] In this way, past suffering must inform all utopian longing if it is to be responsible for historical injustice.

The shudder has a complex relation to spirit. Although the shudder is produced by spirit in artworks, which present the shudder's "legacy" or remembered history, this does not mean that the shudder is a wholly rational phenomenon.[278] On the contrary: Adorno's concept of spirit names "the self-recognition of spirit itself as natural."[279] Spirit

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[274] AT, p. 349.
[275] Guzzoni, 'Hegel's Untruth…', p. 88.
[276] AT, p. 349.
[277] AT, p. 349.
[278] AT, p. 157.
[279] AT, p. 257.

encompasses subjectivity and objectivity, which mutually condition each other. Yet this recognition cannot involve categorical determinate judgment, or even reflective judgment, because it must involve another kind of awareness—one that does not repress bodily and unconscious processes. "Art is spiritualized not by the ideas it affirms but through the elemental—the intentionless—that is able to receive the spirit in itself; the dialectic of the elemental and spirit is the truth content."[280] This is why art's increasing spiritualization involves the integration of the nonidentical, rather than its suppression.[281] We can define the nonidentical as a complex of natural-material-objective-historical processes—which cause instrumental reason to fail in its attempts at systematization.

With this background, we can see that Adorno is struggling to balance experience between two dialectical poles, which remain in tension throughout his work. On the one hand, Adorno discusses the shudder as a somatic and quasi-physical experience, which leads away from reflection, because it makes past suffering present; on the other hand, Adorno must ensure that the shudder plays an enlightened and philosophical function in aesthetic experience—as a force that enables critical awareness (for example, of the violence and suffering caused by instrumental reason). This contradiction animates the aesthetic category, but it also pulls the subject in two different directions.

Negative Dialectics and the Primacy of Critical Reason

Adorno, throughout his work but most notably in *Negative Dialectics*, asserts that critical experience—that experience capable of resisting ideological illusion—must involve the subject's philosophical rationality: "The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the nonconceptual with concepts, without making it their equal."[282] Since subjectivity has no choice but to employ rationality if it wishes to avoid empty sensory experience that cannot critically evaluate false claims, it must use concepts to transcend conceptual cognition, and to open that which expresses difference or otherness: the nonidentical. Adorno asserts: "Philosophical reflection makes sure of the nonconceptual

[280] AT, p. 257.
[281] AT, p. 257.
[282] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 10. Hereafter cited as ND.

in the concept. It would be empty otherwise, according to Kant's dictum; in the end, having ceased to be a concept of anything at all, it would be nothing."[283] Reason requires materiality so that it is grounded in real experience; conversely, materiality requires reason so that it is formed in accordance with the subject's critical consciousness of society and history. Utopian cognition would therefore involve "full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection…".[284] These lines make the contradiction referred to earlier painfully clear: if the shudder is an aspect of aesthetic experience that involves somatic and unconscious processes, and if critical consciousness is constrained by its method of operation, which necessarily employs concepts, then how could the shudder give rise to properly critical, mediated, and aware cognition—in which the subject becomes aware of herself as constituted by and through nature and history? The forces repressed by rationality, which arguably rise to the surface during the shudder, must result in the awakening or provoking, rather than the inhibiting or silencing, of critical reason and philosophical reflection.

Why does Adorno retain his belief in rationality when it is responsible for such historical devastation? Foster argues that it is not possible to present what lies beyond reason, because such a position falls into either irrationalism or immanentism.[285] Adorno "consistently refuses the temptation to present what exceeds that conception [the conception of disenchanted rationality] as a possible standpoint."[286] According to Adorno, on Foster's account, the belief that we may transcend disenchanted or reified rationality is problematic because it risks falling into two untenable positions.[287] The first position is simply irrationalism—the belief that there is a "deeper thought" that lies "beyond" rationality; the second position involves attempting to communicate such a "deeper" or transcendent reason in disenchanted or "reduced" concepts, which merely cancels the transcendence of the first position and returns the subject to false immanence.[288] Foster remarks, "Adorno saw that the only way out of this oscillation between irrationalism, and

[283] ND, p. 12.
[284] ND, p. 13.
[285] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery…*, p. 28.
[286] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery…*, p. 28.
[287] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery…*, p. 28.
[288] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery…*, p. 28.

a reduction to what is already known, lay in a rigorous, immanent critique of our concepts."[289]

Before we discuss Adorno's concept further, we should survey a few scholars who have written about the shudder. Julian Roberts notes that the sublime allows to subject to be "[l]iberated from the discursive".[290] Such discursive breakdown causes true experience, which occurs when "[t]he object breaks free of the constraints of intellectual intent and claims for itself a truth from which it is otherwise estranged".[291] The subject undergoes "perturbation" (*Erschutterung*) when she gives herself over to the object and "forgets herself".[292] Although Roberts rightly emphasizes the forgetting involved in the sublime, he also suggests that nonidentity involves the complete disappearance of discursive thought. Yet for Adorno nonidentity is only expressed through the mediation of discursive thought.[293]

Surti Singh argues that the shudder offers a way of bridging the Enlightenment subject and an "anticipatory subjectivity" that does not yet exist.[294] "The shudder, which Adorno defines as the act of being touched by the other, is made possible by art's mimetic comportment that fosters a passivity toward the other—assimilating itself to the other instead of subordinating it. This experience of being touched by the other evokes a subjectivity that is not yet subjectivity—it is an anticipatory subjectivity that emerges from the momentary suspension of the dominant rationality."[295] Singh analyzes the complex relationship between Kant's account of the sublime and Adorno's account of the shudder. She also notes that the shudder consists in a dialectic between mimesis and

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[289] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery*…, p. 28.

[290] Julian Roberts, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Politics in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory', in *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter*, Peter de Bolla and Stefan H. Uhlig (eds.) (Houndmills and Basingstoke, 2009), p. 95.

[291] Roberts, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle…', p. 95.

[292] Roberts, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle…', p. 95.

[293] Michael Cahn, 'Subversive Mimesis: Theodor W. Adorno and the modern impasse of critique', in Simon Jarvis (ed), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume II*, (4 vols, London and New York, 2007).

[294] Surti Singh, 'The Aesthetic Experience of Shudder: Adorno and the Kantian Sublime', in Nathan Ross (ed), T*he Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings in Benjamin and Adorno* (Lanham and Boulder, 2015), p. 130.

[295] Singh, 'The Aesthetic Experience…', p. 132.

Enlightenment reason. That is, the mimetic shudder as it appears in the artwork criticizes the repressive and controlling activity of rationality. Singh rightly emphasizes the fact that the shudder forces the subject to encounter the nature within her, which implicitly reveals the Kantian concept of autonomy to be grounded in violence: "The sublime construction of the artwork shakes the subject's rigid categories by making it aware of the suppressed otherness—nature—upon which its autonomy is based. The shudder is a reminder of what is sacrificed in the formation of enlightenment subjectivity."[296]

Adorno casts the shudder as a pre-reflective response. The problem with Adorno's account of the shudder is that it is non-cognitive, because it erupts into consciousness before reason can control it. Yet, this dynamic feature may also rescue the subject—through animating frozen faculties, and inciting philosophical thought. On the one hand, it is valuable to provide a refuge for a somatic responsiveness that remains autonomous from rationality (for instance, sensory passivity or bodily suffering). However, if the shudder is divorced from cognition entirely, it risks losing its capacity for critique, which allows the subject to reflect upon social falsity—rather than merely react to it. If aesthetic experience is viewed as non-cognitive, it remains constitutively unable to provide a critique of social and historical untruth. To sum up, in order to ensure that the shudder is not viewed as an irrational or immediate response to objectivity, it must be able to incite, and awaken, philosophical thought—while not being identical to such thought.

We can describe the shudder as a force that awakens and jolts the subject. In archaic pre-historic experience the subject felt fear; in modern aesthetic experience, however, the subject experiences shock, which makes a break or rupture in her experience. This break is not merely destructive, because it opens a space in experience that reflection may occupy, in order to orient itself in a way that acknowledges the object.

The traditional account of sublime experience provides a partial model for the shudder. However, Kant's model is too dependent on a redemptive hope for positive transcendence, which Adorno cannot share. In Adorno, the Kantian model is amended to reflect modern historical experience. As we have seen, in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*,

[296] Singh, 'The Aesthetic Experience…', p. 138.

the experience of the dynamical sublime occurs in two stages. The subject becomes aware of objectivity (in the failure of imagination); next, the subject becomes aware of her own agency (in the awareness of moral freedom). Kant maintains that aesthetic nonidentity may be transcended through subjective control. This occurs when the imagination fails, which threatens to throw the subject's capacity for presentation into disarray; as a result, the subject's reason attains sovereignty over sensibility. The truth content in the Kantian sublime lies in the insight that failure may enable reflection. However, such reflection is always negative for Adorno. Sublime experience indicates a crisis within subjectivity that Kant attempts to avoid. The Kantian subject conceives of nature as the opposite of freedom, and so remains discounts the fact that nature is freedom's material condition. Nonetheless, Adorno should supplement his account of the shudder with the following Kantian insight: that, when experience splinters, the subject may become aware of the repressed object. In Kant's theory such awareness (the frustration of failure) is immediately superseded by the subject's knowledge of her alleged freedom (and aesthetic pleasure).

The shudder arises historically when subjectivity is separated from nature, and when the subject perceives nature as a threat to reason, rather than as a part of reason. Subjectivity has been most traumatically wrenched away from nature in the twentieth century. For Adorno, the atrocities of fascism and the Nazi death camps provided a horrific reason why a new categorical imperative was required in the twentieth century.[297] For Adorno, philosophy and art could no longer claim that their conditions of possibility could transcend historical, cultural, and social experience. Philosophy that does not reflect on the fact that it is mediated by history, culture, and society is complicit in their irrationality. Thus fascism, which infiltrated subjectivity through distorting rationality, threatened to destroy the capacity for philosophical reflection altogether. Adorno argues that the extreme horrors of the twentieth century demonstrate that the subject must not forget her material conditions, and that reason must reflect on its goals and purposes so that it does not mistake unique particulars for universal signifiers. Fascist violence is a

[297] Friedlander, *The Years of Persecution…*', pp. 104-109. See also James Gordon Finlayson, 'Adorno: Modern Art, Metaphysics and Radical Evil', *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 71-95, at p. 86.

direct result of the bureaucratic cruelty that valorizes action for its own sake, and divorces materiality from experience, resulting in pure abstraction.

Kant is unable to theorize and recognize—much less diagnose—social pathology (historical and social illness that infects rationality). For this reason, Adorno realized, traditional cultural categories could not be relied upon to provide enlightening or progressive experience, because they are unable to critically examine their own contents. Thus, traditional categories must revise themselves so that they become new; these new categories must reflect upon society, history, and human experience.

The Shudder as Spontaneity

The shudder is Adorno's negative description of *spontaneity*—considered as both historical and natural.[298] This explains why it oscillates between immediacy and mediation: the shudder is both a historical-social phenomenon and a spontaneous phenomenon that arises through the dialectic between subject and object, which animates and revives critical agency. Thus the shudder offers a critique of Kant's concept of spontaneity as spiritual autonomy, which arises from the subject alone, and which excludes nature or objectivity. Since for Adorno the shudder arises as the subject separates herself from nature, and since both history and nature constitute subjectivity, we may also describe the shudder as the agency within nature—which spontaneously reflects on itself.

Recall the passage discussed earlier, in which Adorno maintains: "What later came to be called subjectivity, freeing itself from the blind anxiety of the shudder, is at the same time the shudder's own development; life in the subject is nothing but what shudders, the reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell."[299] Enlightenment subjectivity—which arises out of the divorce between nature and history, or myth and

[298] Strictly speaking, the shudder is not a response to Kant's concept of moral freedom, because such freedom remains a regulative ideal, and has no concrete appearance in experience. That is, for Kant, practical agency proceeds under the rational idea of freedom. Thanks to Diarmuid Costello for clarifying these ideas for me.
[299] AT, pp. 418-419.

Enlightenment—constitutes a repression of the shudder. At the same time, the shudder contributes a certain agency to the Enlightenment subject—although this agency should not be defined in terms of Kantian spontaneity, in which the subject controls the object, thereby defining reason's capacity to dominate materiality. This agency should be defined as a certain dynamism through which nature spontaneously reflects upon itself. This explains Adorno's paradoxical definition of the shudder: it is both "life" (that is, a capacity for resistance that is mediated by nature and history) and a "reaction" to ideological reification that remains capable of transcending it.[300] Rick Elmore claims that the shudder ultimately expresses ecological experience because it is an experience of the life within the subject: "The shudder or living part of subjectivity is that within consciousness that resists thought's tendency to take itself as all there is or all that matters. It is the reminder of the objective essence of thought…".[301] I agree, but would add that the shudder is a force of resistance as well.

The shudder rises above the spell of ideology because it is the natural element of the subject that contains the germ of reflexivity—that is, it remains a kind of agency that is not merely subjective, but objective as well. This natural or material agency has been consistently denied by the philosophical tradition, especially the post-Kantian variety, but it remains crucial to acknowledge it, particularly during the current historical crisis, in which the repression of non-human or animal nature is made possible (and more vicious) by the repression of human nature—and in which the survival of all nature (human and non-human) depends on the subject's non-violent relationship to objectivity.

The shudder bridges pre-historical experience (the fear of threatening nature) with historical experience (the critical reflection on that fear, which involves acting nonviolently towards nature and therefore overcoming one's immediate reactions). The shudder is also the power of the subject to react to reification without becoming assimilated to it—that is, without becoming reified herself. Thus the shudder names the subject's capacity for resistance to reification, which has been severely reduced by

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[300] AT, pp. 418-419.

[301] Rick Elmore, 'Ecological Experience: Aesthetics, Life, and the Shudder in Adorno's Critical Theory', in Ross (ed), *The Aesthetic Ground*…, p. 150.

instrumental reason but not destroyed completely. The shudder names a kind of non-rational agency.

The shudder is "opposed to" lived experience [*Erlebnis*], in which the subject uncritically satisfies her desires, or gains shallow pleasure, without reflecting on the function of that pleasure in the social-historical context, and without using ethical judgment.[302] The shudder is opposed to lived experience because it constitutes natural agency that provokes dynamic movement: movement that must be repressed or forgotten by the transcendental subject, but which constantly reappears in the empirical subject. Such movement assists cognitive reflection, although the shudder operates on a somatic level, because this dynamic movement resists reification, and the desire to separate subject from object, which is driven by the fear of otherness.

In order to understand the difference between lived-experience (*Erlebnis*) and thought-experience (*Erfahrung*), we must turn to Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller." Benjamin writes that, after the First World War, shell-shocked soldiers could no longer communicate their traumatic experiences; as a result, narrative storytelling declined as a source of meaning, because the self could no longer be considered whole or integrated. Benjamin writes:

> …experience has fallen in value. […] with the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer but poorer in communicable experience? […] For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare…bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath those clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.[303]

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[302] AT, p. 319.

[303] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Hannah Arendt (ed. and intro.), Harry Zohn (trans.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York, 2007), pp. 83-84.

At issue for Benjamin is the individual subject's traumatic loss of a kind of relationship to the world, and to the self, which results from modernity's alienated distance from moral and reflective ends. Benjamin articulates two distinct forms of experience in modern life: unreflective and shallow experience, in which the subject is constantly distracted and shocked by fetishistic appearances (*Erlebnis*), and thoughtful and patient experience, which is capable of reflecting on both subject and object (*Erfahrung*).[304]

The shudder is a force for possibility rather than mere actuality—it is critical dynamism that is capable of "shattering" repetitive stasis. Thus the shudder is critical and enlivening simultaneously. Instrumental rationality is broken apart by the shudder, in order to reveal another kind of agency that is constituted by nature and history.

> For a few moments the I becomes aware, in real terms, of the possibility of letting self-preservation fall away, though it does not actually succeed in realizing this possibility. It is not the aesthetic shudder that is semblance but rather its attitude to objectivity: In its immediacy the shudder feels the potential as if it were actual. The I is seized by the unmetaphorical, semblance-shattering consciousness: that it itself is not ultimate, but semblance. […] This subjective experience [*Erfahrung*] directed against the I is an element of the objective truth of art.[305]

The shudder is a force of "possibility": it allows the subject to imagine that bracketing her determinative judgment could be possible, and thus grants the possibility of a different relationship to objectivity or nature.[306] Thus it re-enchants subjectivity while also remaining critical of unethical or false instrumentality. The shudder also destroys the illusion that the transcendental subject grounds the empirical subject—which opens up the potential for another concept of spontaneity, in which the subject would not dominate nature, but would actively embrace the non-violent "unity of the multiplicitous."[307]

In the sublime, Kant tries to resolve imagination's failure. Kant's solution however implies that only reason may synthesize objectivity. For Adorno, on the contrary, reason and mimesis require each other, because "thought...approaches tautology when it shrinks from the sublimation of the mimetic comportment. The fatal separation of

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[304] Thanks to Nick Lawrence for clarifying Benjamin's concepts for me.
[305] AT, p. 320.
[306] AT, p. 320.
[307] AT, p. 194.

the two came about historically and is revocable. *Ratio* without mimesis is self-negating."[308] Reason manipulates objects when it employs them exclusively as means. Such calculation forgets that every object is a qualitative manifold in experience.[309] Aesthetic comportment, by contrast, is the "process that mimesis sets in motion":

> ...aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder, as if goose bumps were the first aesthetic image. What later came to be called subjectivity, freeing itself from the blind anxiety of the shudder, is at the same time the shudder's own development; life in the subject is nothing but what shudders, the reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell. Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness. That shudder in which subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity is the act of being touched by the other. Aesthetic comportment assimilates itself to that other rather than subordinating it. Such a constitutive relation of the subject to objectivity in aesthetic comportment joins eros and knowledge.[310]

The shudder involves "anxiety" because it is a reaction to nonidentity: the divide between reason and nature. At the same time, the shudder develops into true subjectivity, or spontaneity—the capacity to overcome the fear of otherness, and to embrace the nature within reason. In modern times, this development appears only in works of authentic art. Adorno writes that the shudder is "life in the subject", which suggests that it is a force of resistance, capable of animating frozen nature.[311] In this sense, the shudder both reacts to and transcends "the spell"—reified illusion.[312] Finally, the shudder constitutes a kind of agency that exists before subjectivity is fully developed—that is, before reason learns to

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[308] AT, p. 418.
[309] AT, p. 418. As Krebber explains, Bacon and other Enlightenment philosophers assumed that humanity's destiny and divine right was to triumph over nature. Bacon writes: "'Let the human race only be given the chance to regain its God-given authority over nature, then indeed will right reason and true religion govern the way we exert it'. […] [The Enlightenment,] [i]nstead of seeing the object as an object in itself and then trying to influence it, reason and thought became agents of rebuilding, reproducing and, eventually, creating the natural objects." Krebber, 'Anthropocentrism and Reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*…', p. 329.
[310] AT, pp. 418-419.
[311] AT, pp. 418-419.
[312] AT, pp. 418-419.

repress nature. Such agency appears in the encounter with otherness, but it is not merely a reaction to that otherness. Instead, the subject embraces nature. This act is both active (because it is initiated by forces in the subject) and passive (because it does not involve determinative judgment). The subject that is able to assimilate herself to objectivity instead of merely mastering it is truly liberated: because the natural-historical sedimentation within her reason is not repressed, and because she recognizes that she is animated by the same agency that animates objectivity.[313] In this way, the shudder should be defined as a kind of spontaneity that is material and non-subjective, and which is continuous with, rather than separate from, objectivity or nature.

Adorno re-names the relationship between mimesis and rationality "eros and knowledge" for two reasons.[314] The shudder, which brings the subject closer to the object, allows each to gain awareness of the other. For this reason, the relation is epistemic. On the other hand, the shudder cannot separate itself from those somatic and natural desires that compose subjectivity, and reason itself. Thus eros—or desire, which Adorno also names Kantian interest—is a driving force within aesthetic experience. Adorno observes: "One can say that precisely in the taboo placed on desire by the work of art, precisely in the refusal of every work to be touched, consumed or in any way appropriated, lies that element of nature that was present in desire—but now sublated in its negative form."[315] In other words, the artwork sublimates desire in order to carve out an autonomous realm for itself. Sublimation, however, causes pain, because it distances the desiring subject from the object of her desire; thus, beauty expresses suffering for Adorno.[316] Finally, in dialectical fashion, sublimation cannot help but express remnants of that which it tries to transform. As we have discussed earlier, interest cannot be eradicated in an attempt to purify judgment; instead, it must be embraced and reflected upon in order to dissolve its regressive and blind directionality. The shudder returns the subject to her own nature, in order to demonstrate how reason arises out of natural impulses. Knowledge of objectivity only occurs through mimetic comportment, which follows desire instead of repressing it.

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[313] AT, pp. 418-419.
[314] AT, p. 419.
[315] Adorno, *Aesthetics*…, p. 34. Cf. pp. 31-34, 98.
[316] Adorno, *Aesthetics*…, p. 32-33.

We can now see that the question discussed above—how the shudder may be considered merely sensory or somatic and yet able to bring the subject to conscious awareness of external and internal conditions—may be resolved. The shudder, considered as spontaneity, names the animate potential within nature that allows subjectivity to embrace difference. As a dynamic force, the shudder is neither mimesis nor reason, considered as isolated poles; rather, it is the tension that holds them apart.

The shudder, finally, responds to the Kantian sublime in several different ways. The shudder is an experience of spontaneity described negatively—a recollection of the pre-historic past that points towards future possibilities. The spontaneity of the shudder, however, appears through nature, rather than through the transcendental subject. In addition, the shudder, like the sublime, dramatizes the encounter between objectivity and subjectivity, in order to clarify the subject's relation towards difference or otherness. The shudder and the sublime both describe nature, and the subject's relation to the natural world. For Kant, nature must be organized and mastered in order to produce it as cognitive material; for Adorno, nature must be listened to and accepted so that the subject does not repress and imprison her own impulses. Adorno's description of the shudder indicates that nature may animate itself. For this reason, the shudder is a force of resistance—which allows subjectivity to transcend reified illusion towards freedom.

This allows us to return to the guiding claim of the whole thesis: that philosophical reflection requires historical experience if it is to avoid reification. The shudder demonstrates that another, non-subjective, concept of spontaneity must be developed from out of historical experience—namely, reason's domination of nature, and the abstraction of subject from object. In addition, art requires philosophy so that the historical experience within it may be radicalized: in the same way that the shudder develops its agency or spontaneity through moving between nature and sprit, or subject and object. Thus the shudder is neither wholly sensuous nor wholly cognitive; it exists as the animating force that guides both of those extremes.

Chapter Three: Adorno's Concept of Mimesis and the Kantian Imagination

Section One: Expression, Mimesis, and Reification

"The inextricability of reification and mimesis defines the aporia of artistic expression."[317]

In the last chapter I discussed that aspect of aesthetic experience that may be considered objective: the sublime, or the shudder. This chapter continues our investigation of objectivity. In the first section of this chapter I will discuss Adorno's accounts of mimesis, and his account of aesthetic expression. I begin with Adorno's account of mimesis, and argue that its proximity to reification presents a challenge for any critical theory of aesthetics. Then in the second section I turn to Kant's account of imagination, and the artistic genius, in order to argue that they provide the fertile ground from which Adorno's theory of expression develops. For Kant, genius rests on the concept of nature; likewise, for Adorno, mimesis rests on the experience of otherness, or nonidentity. As we become aware of the genesis of Adornian concepts, we may judge them more fairly; in addition, we may come to know the concrete consequences of the historical distance that separates Kant and Adorno for any theory of aesthetics. For these reasons, historical analysis is a necessary aspect of philosophical reflection.

Reification is an invaluable concept for any Marxist social critique. Yet its precise definition is controversial. For instance, Hulatt claims that reification should not be considered objective; rather, it is a subjective feature of experience that conflates the subjective concept and the material object.[318] For this reason, according to Hulatt, identity thinking is itself reification. Hulatt writes: "Reification, for Adorno, is the propensity of the individual to accept concepts as exhaustively modeling their object."[319] Hulatt argues for a Kantian reading of reification as an "*epistemological* tendency"—in which the subject's distorted experience forces her to perceive objects in a distorted manner, similar to transcendental illusion. The problem with Hulatt's definition is that it cannot explain—

[317] AT, p. 153.
[318] Hulatt, *Adorno's Theory of Philosophical*…, pp. 62-65.
[319] Hulatt, *Adorno's Theory of Philosophical*, p. 62.

and even avoids—Adorno's concept of damaged life: the fact that nature (the objectivity within subjectivity) is violently harmed by rational practices. Such practices, which result in reified life, do not merely distort perception: they damage objectivity itself. If Hulatt's definition were correct, reification would disappear when true experience (or that which anticipates it) occurs. But this is not the case. After listening to a Beckett play, reification does not disappear—although suffering may be alleviated, as damaged subjects express their pain. For these reasons, I do not think that Hulatt's definition is accurate. Reification is objective; it is caused by violence; and it results in the freezing of fluid dynamism: death.

Recall that, for Kant, imagination mediates between the faculties, which are isolated from one another, in order to bring freedom and nature together.[320] Dusing claims that the free play of the faculties "rests on" the rational idea of the supersensible substrate of humanity; as a result, aesthetic judgment allows the subject to bridge nature and freedom.[321] In the same fashion, for Adorno, mimetic comportment allows the artist proximity to social-historical reality, and grants her an experience of nonidentity. Peter Osborne observes: "Adorno defines mimesis as 'the non-conceptual affinity of a subjective creation with its objective and unposited other'. It is this non-conceptual character that is crucial to art's metaphysical role as a 'spokesman for repressed nature' (the nonidentical)".[322]

Adorno's concept of expression is grounded in his concept of mimesis. Yet the diverse functions of mimetic comportment are startling: Adorno argues that it remains a subjective faculty that may express objectivity; a quasi-rational faculty that escapes the irrationality of instrumental reason; a cognitive mode of perception that appears in aesthetic experience; and a mode of behavior that originated in an archaic or pre-historic time, which is capable of resisting the coercion of Enlightenment reason.[323] It is not

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[320] Sarah L. Gibbons, *Kant's Theory of Imagination: Bridging Gaps in Judgment and Experience* (Oxford, 1994).

[321] Dusing, 'Beauty as the Transition…', p. 89.
[322] See Osborne, 'Adorno and the Metaphysics…', p. 55.
[323] AT, pp. 27, 28, 70, 71, 145-146, 158.

possible to unify these aspects—but their paradoxical nature may be instructive. In this section I'd like to focus on one particular point of tension. Adorno does not explain how mimesis may both present empirical reality while also *separating itself* from that reality's toxicity. The method of imitating empirical reality in order to present social falsity means that mimesis must identify with the defects within that reality. As a result, mimetic comportment must become indistinguishable from the distortions of empirical reality, and the "pathology" of reason itself.[324] Michael Cahn describes the problem as follows: "When art has finally surrendered, however mimetically, to the principle of rationality, then the only conceivable cure of society/nature would have to follow the pattern of *disease curing disease*...'heal the wound by the spear which caused it'...".[325] For this very reason, artworks seem unable to transcend history.[326] Artworks only express the reified nature of experience through sacrificing their mimetic impulses to rationality: "Modern works relinquish themselves mimetically to reification, their principle of death".[327] Miriam Bratu Hansen connects this phenomenon to Freud, zoology, and instrumental reason:

> To the extent that it is patterned on zoological forms of mimicry, Adorno's concept of mimesis involves the slippage between life and death, the assimilation to lifeless material (as in the case of the chameleon) or feigning death for the sake of survival. This paradox, indebted to Freud's theory of the death drive, structures the dichotomies of the mimesis concept in significant ways. In an unreflected form, mimesis as mimicry converges with the regime of instrumental reason, its reduction of life to self-preservation and the reproduction of domination by the very means designed to abolish it. In that sense, mimesis entails what Michael Cahn calls 'a deadly reification compulsion' […]. In the context of aesthetic theory, however, this mimesis onto the reified and alienated ("*Mimesis ans Verhartete und Entfremdete*"), the world of living death, is a crucial means of

[324] Cahn, 'Subversive Mimesis...', p. 363.

[325] Cahn, 'Subversive Mimesis…', p. 363.
[326] AT, p. 50.
[327] AT, p. 175.

> negation available to modern art—as an "admixture of poison," a pharmakon that allegorizes the symptoms though it necessarily fails as a therapy.[328]

Thus we might ask several questions: How can mimetic comportment avoid the danger that it will regress into false life? Is it possible for mimetic comportment to identify itself with reification and avoid regression? And, how does mimetic comportment's practice of identification affect the self in aesthetic experience?[329]

Adorno reflects: "There is no general test for deciding if an artist who wipes out expression altogether has become the mouthpiece of reified consciousness or of the speechless, expressionless expression that denounces it. Authentic art knows the expression of the expressionless, a kind of weeping without tears."[330] An artwork without expression might reflect more directly the totally integrated and rational nature of society, or it might be a failed work, one that has not allowed mimetic impulses to emerge. As Cahn argues, the subject should not attempt to avoid rationality; instead, she must try to use reason to illuminate, rather than to control, an object. For Adorno, "the subject [must] assume an involved attitude in the process of imitation as an adaptive 'identifying with' which is 'guided by the logic (*Logik*) of the object."[331]

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[328] See Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer', in Max Pensky (ed), *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern* (Albany, 1997), pp. 90-91.

[329] Roger Caillois, briefly associated with the Surrealists, researched animal mimesis during the 1930s. He argues that mimetic comportment, as practiced by animals (for instance, the praying mantis), exhibits "non-human forms of creativity, in an aesthetics emancipated from human forms of subjective, rational agency." John T. Hamilton explains: "By imitating a leaf the insect becomes a leaf. By mixing in with its environment, it breaks out of the boundaries that define individuality." See John T. Hamilton, 'The Luxury of Self-destruction: Flirting with Mimesis with Roger Caillois', Presented at Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics This Side of Seduction, a Poetics and Theory/Comparative Literature Workshop, Draper Program, New York University, March 31, 2012. For another excellent article connecting Benjamin's concept of mimesis to Surrealism, see Joyce Cheng, 'Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis: Roger Caillois, Walter Benjamin, and Surrealism in the 1930s', *Modernism/modernity* 16 (January 2009), pp. 61-86.

[330] AT, pp. 153-154.

[331] Cahn, 'Subversive Mimesis…', p. 347.

Mimetic comportment entails a loss of selfhood[332] that may integrate the subject within the social whole. In order to avoid this danger, I propose viewing mimesis as an aspect of philosophical reflection. Adorno's solution—to balance mimesis with rationality—falls short, because rationality and mimesis are two separate poles of experience; they do not affect each other. Bernstein argues that "[m]imesis is appropriation without subsumption; in it the appropriating subject likens herself to the object, reversing conceptual appropriation...".[333] The problem with Bernstein's reading is that it reduces the dialectical interaction between mimesis and construction, and fails to acknowledge that social-historical forces, and not only epistemic considerations, are at work in Kant's distinction between them. Rational construction cannot rescue mimesis from assimilation. Thus, mimetic comportment must become philosophical if it is to resist reification.

My argument will proceed in several steps. I argue first that Adorno's concept of mimesis entails its identification with the pathology of rationality and the abstraction of the social whole; second, I claim that Adorno's concept of expression parallels Kant's concept of the artistic genius; finally, I propose a solution that enables Adorno to overcome the troubling features of mimetic passivity.

Adorno's Concept of Mimesis

Several commentators acknowledge the difficulties that attend Adorno's concept of mimesis (see discussions of Cahn and Hansen, above). Rudiger Bubner explains that "…[t]he recourse to a mimetic perspective is intended philosophically to repair the damage that has been wrought by the sovereign domination of the concept...Through mimesis the human mind restores an almost pre-historical attitude to things. We thus make intimate and unforced contact with things other than ourselves and relinquish our demand for control for the sake of concrete experience."[334]

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[332] Cahn, 'Subversive Mimesis…', p. 360.
[333] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*..., p. 201.
[334] Bubner, 'Can Theory Become Aesthetic?...', p. 28.

Cahn emphasizes the critical and dynamic elements of mimesis, but he downplays the fact that mimesis can lead to abstraction and reification as well as to critique. Hansen emphasizes the connection between mimesis and Freud's concept of the death drive, but she does not propose a solution to the problem of abstraction. Hansen also does not explain how mimesis can be both a "preverbal" kind of knowledge—an automatic reflex or survival mechanism that descends from our animal nature—and a reflective or dialectical form of "negation," a description of deathly symptoms that alleviates but cannot cure.[335] Other commentators pass over the fact that mimesis may become authoritarian, and that it is bound up with death.[336]

Adorno confirms that the artwork must "absorb" or accept that which threatens to destroy it if is to avoid obliteration by commodification.[337] "But the artwork must absorb even its most fatal enemy—fungibility; rather than fleeing into concretion, the artwork must present through its own concretion the total nexus of abstraction and thereby resist it".[338] That is, artworks must avoid becoming fungible or exchangeable. When this occurs—for instance, when works are commodified—they no longer express objectivity. The work must adapt itself to totality in order to present, and therefore neutralize, its most violent features. This occurs through aesthetic form and technique.[339] How can modern art remain a powerful source of resistance if it aspires to become unified with domination? Martin Jay observes: "In the case of Adorno, mimesis becomes problematic when it is in league not with reason per so but with the instrumental rationality of the modern world. Then what it imitates is the *nature morte* of a world of reified relations, in

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[335] Hansen, 'Mass Culture…', pp. 90-91.

[336] See for instance Mapp, 'No Nature…', in *Adorno and Literature*, p. 162; Gerhard Richter, 'Aesthetic Theory and Nonpropositional Truth Content in Adorno', in Gerhard Richter (ed), *Language Without Soil: Adorno and Late Philosophical Modernity* (New York, 2010), p. 140; Osborne, 'Adorno and the Metaphysics…', p. 155; Stark, 'The Dignity…', p. 66; Gunter Figal, 'Natural Beauty and the "Representative" Character of the Work of Art', Nicholas Walker (trans), in Simon Jarvis (ed), *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume I* (4 vols, London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 79; Espen Hammer, 'Minding the World: Adorno's Critique of Idealism', in Gerard Delanty (ed), *Theodor W. Adorno: Sage Masters of Modern Social Thought, Volume I* (London, Thousand Oaks, 2004), p. 93.

[337] AT, p. 178.

[338] AT, p. 178.

[339] AT, p. 178.

which the suffering of both humans and nature is no longer expressed".[340] Adorno argues that artworks may only criticize reality through a thorough knowledge of the violence and suffering that such reality produces. Adorno explains that modern art is dark for historical reasons: "Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of a mute reality, does art become eloquent; this is why art no longer tolerates the innocuous."[341] Art's capacity for expression is connected with its capacity to imitate reality and to present suffering. Other artworks or artists contend that mere refusal is sufficient to criticize reality; Adorno argues against this solution, because it violates the principle of dialectical critique, which must remain close to its object in order to know it on its own terms.

The formal violence practiced on material follows the material's resistance to formal subjugation:

> The violence done to the material imitates the violence that issued from the material and that endures in its resistance to form. The subjective domination of the act of forming is not imposed on materials but is read out of them; the cruelty of forming is mimesis of myth, with which it struggles. […] If in modern artworks cruelty raises its head undisguised, it confirms the idea that in the face of the overwhelming force of reality art can no longer rely on its a priori ability to transform the dreadful into form. Cruelty is an element of art's critical reflection on itself; art despairs over the claim to power that it fulfills in being reconciled.[342]

The first two sentences in this passage appear to be at odds with each other: how could violence "done to the material" *not* be "imposed on" that same material?[343] However, I think that Adorno is arguing that, since artistic form constitutes an imitation of the violence practiced against the material ("subjective domination…is read out of [material]"), the violence is not imposed upon the latter from above; rather, the formal violence occurs mimetically, through following the experiential impulses of the material

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[340] Martin Jay, 'Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe.', in Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (eds.), *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1997), p. 46.
[341] AT, p. 28.
[342] AT, p. 65.
[343] AT, p. 65. Thanks to Diarmuid Costello for indicating this tension.

itself. According to Adorno, aesthetic form and material must use violence as a productive practice. This principle is clearly at odds with Adorno's desire for non-violent synthesis: the search for a method of composition that listens to the material instead of submitting it to external organization. Adorno seems to justify such violence by arguing that "cruelty" is rendered impotent when it is translated from the empirical to the aesthetic sphere.[344] Yet aesthetic violence has a definite impact on subjectivity. And psychological violence is just as pernicious as physical violence. Modern artworks should not merely "transform" suffering: such transformation amounts to silencing suffering instead of expressing it.[345] Yet art's identification with violence entails that even philosophical reflection is contaminated, because the act of reflection must imitate instrumental rationality in order to avoid it. Adorno seems to suggest that there is no aspect of the artwork that is not implicated in domination, and that the only way to avoid empirical violence is to use a modified form of violence that is carefully measured or controlled. This method is troubling, for it suggests that there is hardly any difference between the artwork's technique and the social-historical practices that it seeks to present and reflect upon. Jay writes that, for Adorno, "aesthetic illusion…resists mimetological closure, or what he calls the 'general mimetic abandonment to reification, which is the principle of death'".[346] Adorno notes that works' organizing principles are affected by reality; for instance, artistic montage emerges from society's brokenness.[347] The spectre that the world has become a closed totality—that is, immune to possibility or difference—is what forces artworks to imitate, rather than attempting to transcend, reality.

> That art, something mimetic, is possible in the midst of rationality, and that it employs its means, is a response to the faulty irrationality of the rational world as an over-administered world. For the aim of all rationality—the quintessence of the means for dominating nature—would have to be something other than means, hence something not rational.[348]

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[344] AT, p. 65.
[345] AT, p. 65.
[346] Jay, 'Mimesis and Mimetology…', pp. 39-40.
[347] Jay, 'Mimesis and Mimetology…', pp. 39-40.
[348] AT, p. 70.

In other words, philosophical reason is oriented towards critique, which tries to uncover truth; instrumental reason is driven by its own capacity for domination. For this reason, instrumental reason is irrational, because it cannot perceive or posit ends. Mimetic comportment reveals reason's irrationality through becoming like its object: hardened, dead, and mechanical. Yet the danger of such a method is that its proximity to death will overcome and eventually destroy the agent that tries to employ it. For instance, one could argue that Dada—the artistic movement that railed against the destruction of the First World War, and the hypocrisy and injustice of bourgeois capitalist society—eventually succumbed to the same nihilistic violence that it attempted to expose.

Adorno states that, although art and empirical totality both use rationality, the latter uses it for violent ends while the former uses it to expose violence.[349] Figal argues that interpretation relies on mimesis: "Interpretive mimesis is also a pre-rational relationship to the object, one that helps to resolve the enigma by tracing the immanent structures of the work of art to the point at which they break down".[350] The problem with this argument is that there seems to be no clear way of ensuring that artworks will critique, rather than promote, violence. At what point should the mimetic method withdraw from its object in order to begin reflecting upon its brutality? How is it possible to reflect philosophically if reason must become irrational? Furthermore, artworks must hold themselves at a distance from social untruth in order to be autonomous. How may Adorno's demand that the artwork become autonomous be reconciled with his demand that mimetic comportment absorb reification? The principle that the artwork has two aspects—heteronomous and autonomous—does not resolve the issue, because they operate at different levels. According to Cahn, artworks are mimetic through their relation to artistic material: the "historically mediated 'words, colors, sounds, forms and procedures' […]. The mimetic behavior towards the material implies accepting and cherishing it, being 'guided by its logic'...Mimesis, paradoxically oscillating between advertisement and critique, places art in the dilemma of affirming what it negates:

[349] AT, p. 70.
[350] Figal, 'Natural Beauty…', p. 79.

rationality".[351] For Adorno, the attempt to isolate art from rationalization must fail, because art cannot divorce itself from modern history:

> Art is a stage in the process of what Max Weber called the disenchantment of the world, and it is entwined with rationalization; this is the source of all of art's means and methods of production; technique that disparages its ideology inheres in this ideology as much as it threatens it because art's magical heritage stubbornly persisted throughout art's transformations. Yet art mobilizes technique in an opposite direction than does domination.[352]

Technique is able to differentiate its activity from the domination of nature because the aesthetic domination of material through technical procedures occurs in a realm partially autonomous from society; thus, such domination may be reflected upon, which effectively strips aesthetic violence of its aura of inevitability or authority. Still, Adorno's reassurances that the violence of art is qualitatively different from the violence of society occasionally sound hollow, because the coercion of particulars takes place in both cases—whether in society or in the artwork. Adorno admits: "the fatality of all contemporary art [is] that it is contaminated by the untruth of the ruling totality".[353] Adorno might respond that, since there is no sphere that is able to remain free of domination, it would be untruthful of art to pretend that such purity exists; for this reason, violence must appear in works of art, in order to remind the subject of its repressed history. Mimesis remains the remnant of pre-historic, archaic, and magical practices that allow an agent to identify with an object in order to know it. Hence mimesis practices an alternative form of identification: instead of determining an object, the agent merges with or enters an object, thereby sacrificing its own identity. This is a dangerous course because—although it doubtless enables the agent close proximity with objectivity—it risks blurring the line between agent and object. At its worst, such blurring may destroy the agent's capacity for reflection, which depends on retaining a distance between subject and object. In addition, the object's tendencies—which due to fascism and capitalism are increasingly irrational and authoritarian—may infiltrate the agent.

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[351] Cahn, 'Subversive Mimesis…', p. 357.
[352] AT, p. 70.
[353] AT, p. 73.

Is mimesis an irrational method for attaining truth? Or is mimesis a variety of philosophical reflection? Adorno seems uncertain of the answer. The question is important because it determines whether or not mimetic comportment wholly identifies itself with its object, and the extent to which such comportment may provide a critique. Bernstein rightly connects mimesis and expression: "The expressiveness of objects is part of what is lost as they become conceptualized by idealist principles and positive science. Mimesis in artworks, Adorno claims, is [one] of the expressive features of objects that the world no longer contains".[354] Adorno does not provide enough assurance that mimesis may reflectively uncover the object. Yet such reflection is necessary if art is to avoid reproducing those categories that it seeks to escape from. Mimesis is a rational method that aims to uncover the irrational:

> The survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent as 'rational.' For that to which the mimetic comportment responds is the telos of knowledge, which art simultaneously blocks with its own categories. Art completes knowledge with what is excluded from knowledge and thereby once again impairs its character as knowledge, its univocity.[355]

In this definition, mimesis is a method that pulls subjectivity towards objectivity. The virtue of mimesis is its acceptance of otherness. Yet, as mentioned above, this force should be treated with caution, since it has the power to dissolve identity—in the same way that magical practices in pre-history brought out the latent nature within subjectivity in order to heal it. Adorno writes: "The surrender of art, pulled between regression to literal magic or surrender of the mimetic impulse to thinglike rationality, dictates its law of motion; the aporia cannot be eliminated. […] Art is rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it…".[356] For Adorno, the artwork is a kind of "force field" that is caught between mimesis and rationality.[357] Further, "To survive reality at its most extreme and grim, artworks that do not want to sell themselves as consolation must

[354] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1087.
[355] AT, p. 70.
[356] AT, p. 71.
[357] AT, p. 237.

equate themselves with that reality. Radical art today is synonymous with dark art; its primary color is black."[358] Weitzman interprets the artwork's blackness as its "refusal" to mean anything determinate; I suggest instead that we should read it as an indication of the work's reified interior.[359] Yet in order to critique rationality while remaining rational, some operation must occur that enables the agent to be both external and internal to the totality. Perhaps this is the power of mimesis: it enables independence and dependence at the same time. Yet what needs to be explained is how precisely art's "law of motion" may be controlled: for instance, what keeps the language of the work from degenerating into ideology or false illusion?[360] A Dada collage by Kurt Schwitters may literally cut out parts of the empirical world and re-organize them in order to turn violence against itself (Figure 2). Yet unless the empirical world somehow can reflect on the suffering that it produces, it is difficult to understand how aspects of that world could become progressive. Max Paddison confirms that mimesis involves merging with the environment or totality:

> Callois argues that mimicry cannot be explained merely as a defence mechanism to protect creatures—especially insects—from predators, because it often does not prevent them from being consumed as prey. He proposes that it is also to do with ritual and 'magic,' an assimilation by and surrender to the environment combined with a corresponding loss of self. It is indeed a reversal of the 'life instinct', and a regressive move towards loss of identity and assimilation to nature.[361]

Adorno tries to justify mimetic comportment by arguing that its survival acts as a critique in itself.[362]

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[358] AT, p. 39.
[359] Weitzman, 'No *Fun*…', p. 190.
[360] AT, p. 71.

[361] Max Paddison, 'Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Expression', *Music Analysis*, 29/i-ii-iii (2010), pp. 135.
[362] AT, p. 75.

> Art is motivated by a conflict: Its enchantment, a vestige of its magical phase, is constantly repudiated as unmediated sensual immediacy by the progressive disenchantment of the world, yet without its ever being possible finally to eradicate this magical element. Only in it is art's mimetic character preserved, and its truth is the critique that, by its sheer existence, it levels at a rationality that has become absolute.[363]

This argument is compelling because it does not force mimesis to take on the instrumental method of modern reason in order to critique it—mimesis provides an alternative vision merely through remaining autonomous. However Adorno still needs to explain how mimetic comportment can critique irrationality while simultaneously becoming irrational. Paddison regards mimesis as opposed to reason: "Mimesis in this sense may be regarded as a pre-rational, or not-yet-rational, mode of behaviour, with an affinity towards the sensuous and embodied, non-conceptual re-enactment of cognitive processes."[364]

The concept of mimetic comportment may be strengthened if it is conceived of as a reflexive practice. In short: mimesis should become philosophically reflective if it is to avoid regression to the totality. Such reflection cannot remain above the fray because both objectivity and subjectivity has been damaged through capitalism, and through the Idealist doctrine that concepts describe the empirical materiality they cover. Yet in order for the artwork to critique the totality, it must employ reflection to supplement mimetic comportment. As Tichy claims, "...the experience of the work itself cannot be grasped as a simply immediate one. On the contrary, the experience of the work must begin from the distance between the hearer or beholder of the work of art."[365] Although mimesis involves surrendering the instrumental rationality of the subject, it must also involve the capacity to reflect upon objectivity through a different kind of reason. Yet subjects only grasp the significance of mimetic comportment when they emerge from the encounter with objectivity and are able to reflect on the emotions and feelings that the encounter

[363] AT, p. 75.
[364] Paddison, 'Mimesis and the Aesthetics…', p. 136.
[365] Tichy, 'The Anticipation of the…', p. 234.

provoked—and on the layers of experience expressed by the object. Thus cognition is a necessary aspect of aesthetic experience: "…*Philosophical or 'second' reflection is constitutive of authentic aesthetic experience*".[366]

One might object that my argument merely reproduces the dialectic of enlightenment: after all, instrumental rationality displaced mimesis through distancing subject from object. My demand that mimesis should become philosophical or reflective is an example of the disenchantment of the world—the increasing rationalization of subjectivity. Mimesis, in Adorno's words, must remain "unmediated sensual immediacy".[367] Yet this objection does not consider the fact that artworks' agency requires autonomy, which only arises through subjectivity. Subjectivity may be rescued through reflection; otherwise, the artwork merely reproduces the empirical world automatically. Since reflection is the most effective means of producing autonomy, it must supplement mimetic comportment if the work is to remain critical. Of course, I am not arguing that mimetic comportment must sacrifice its roots in magical or sensory experience; merely that such experience should incorporate thought within itself. Thought may balance sensory experience in the same way that form balances material in a nonviolent manner.

Now, let's return to the overall argument guiding the dissertation. Our discussion of mimesis allows us to conclude that the artwork requires a balancing act between diverging forces: on the one hand, the artwork must cognize the illusory power of ideology or totality in order to rescue itself from dissolution; on the other hand, the artwork must recognize that it remains immanent to those social forces that promote untruth. The artwork's immanence or closeness allows it proximity to historical experience, and the work gains distance from ideology when it reflects on its own historical conditions. These two contrasting processes may be translated into the language of the thesis as a whole: To avoid the dangers of reification or abstraction, artworks must employ philosophical reflection; conversely, in order to avoid becoming artificial or formal, philosophical reflection must act mimetically and should immanently embrace

[366] Osborne, 'Adorno and the Metaphysics…', p. 54.
[367] AT, p. 75.

the historical experience that artworks express. Thus this section articulates the claim that historical experience is expressed in artworks, which require philosophy to interpret them, and that philosophy requires artworks so that it may be grounded in historical experience. Adorno writes: "A liberated humanity would be able to inherit its historical legacy free of guilt. What was once true in an artwork and then disclaimed by history is only able to disclose itself again when the conditions have changed on whose account that truth was invalidated: Aesthetic truth content and history are that deeply meshed".[368] Freedom, then, is partially determined by the past, which directly affects the present; in this way, both aesthetic truth content and subjective spontaneity are conditioned by history and the immanent context of society. Truth content will appear only obscurely, or not at all, if the proper historical conditions are inadequate or morally false.

Why must philosophical reflection cognize historical experience in order to access truth? One might assume that philosophy's autonomy, which Kant carefully sought to ensure, allowed it to resist Fascism. Yet, philosophy must reflect upon history for the same reason that artworks must reflect upon the false society, which approaches through mimetic comportment. If artworks and philosophical thought are to avoid regression to ideology, then they must become self-aware; such self-awareness occurs when both become cognizant of the historical experience that mediates and conditions their existence. Without historical self-awareness, art and philosophy become instruments of power and unreflecting tools of domination. An example of this in twentieth century art history could be the Italian Futurists' political convictions; although the Futurists created avant-garde art, which arguably was not altogether different from Dadaist and Cubist art, their leader, Marinetti, remained a stalwart defender of the First World War, and glorified Fascist violence and destruction in the most morally reprehensible and shocking terms.[369] Dadaism, and later Surrealism, although each employed different techniques and modes of expression, used form to reflect upon history and society. Such reflection always came

[368] Ibid., p. 51.

[369] Gale, *Dada and Surrealism*; Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London and New York, 1978).

before political reaction. Tristan Tzara's poetry and manifestoes, for all their outrageous bombast and nihilistic fury, are grounded in the untruth of history and society.[370]

Rigor Mortis: The Poetics of Tristan Tzara

We have been discussing why artworks must, in light of the modern historical crises, imitate reification in order to critique it, and the dangers that arrive with that practice. Which artistic movement best embodies the principle of imitating death in order to protest against it? Dada. Surrealism's methodology also comes close through the use of chance, which embraces irrationality and the unconscious. Here I briefly discuss Tristan Tzara's (1896-1963) Dada manifestoes.[371]

The various artists and thinkers who came together to create the Dadaist movement had different goals, hopes, and fears. But they arguably agreed on one thing: that the various systems that compose society (cultural, moral, political, aesthetic, and economic) had to be destroyed. The First World War crushed any illusion that the old order might be restored. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski explain that the "[e]xperience of trench warfare led to a real sense of disgust with the society responsible for it that was so strong it left many people with a real sense of loathing that would never be assuaged."[372] They continue: "The First World War may be said to have exposed the raw nerves of middle-class France by giving the combatants in the war such an experience of rage in an immediate way."[373] Richard Sheppard observes: "The negativity for which Dada is best known derived most immediately from the Dadaists' sense of traumatized outrage at the unprecedented, senseless slaughter of the Great War together

[370] Gale, *Dada and Surrealism*; Richter, *Dada*….
[371] See Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, translated by Barbara Wright, illustrated by Francis Picabia (London and Paris, 1992).
[372] Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, 'Introduction: Surrealism as a Collective Adventure', in Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (eds. and trans.), *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations* (London and Sterling, 2001), p. 3.
[373] Richardson and Fijalkowski, 'Introduction…', p. 3.

with the civilization that had allowed it to happen and been unable to stop it."[374] With this violence came revulsion, but also the glimmer of hope that a new, better world might be constructed. In a fleeting moment of optimism, Tzara proclaimed: "After the carnage we are left with the hope of a purified humanity."[375] Dada's most lasting legacy, however, was to expose and overturn dead tradition. Sheppard continues:

> Tristan Tzara was quite adamant that Dada was born out of a sense of disgust at the war. […] All the Dadaists … formed the conviction that the epoch that had begun with the Renaissance, flowered during the Enlightenment, and culminated in modernity in its contemporary form had come to an end. […] On 18 September 1916, Ball…noted in his diary that the Germany of Idealism had all but disappeared and that the whole of Western civilization had been an illusion…[376]

The Dadaists hated stale bourgeois moralizing; they were committed to techniques of violent shock and tastelessness in order to reveal the horrors of the war, and to provoke the desire for change. However, Dada's nihilistic fury could not wholly separate itself from the society that sought to assimilate everything. In order to accurately present the compromised nature of traditional art, the machinery of war, and the blindness of nationalism, Dada had to immanently embrace society's destructive powers. Kuenzli reports that one of the founders of Dada in Zurich, Hugo Ball,

> …wrote in his diary on 16 June 1916: 'The ideals of culture and of art as a programme for a variety show—that is our kind of *Candide* against the times. People act as if nothing had happened. The slaughter increases, and they cling to the prestige of European glory. They are trying to make the impossible possible and to pass off the betrayal of human beings, the exploitation of the body and soul of people, and all this civilized carnage as a triumph of European intelligence.'[377]

The Dadaists felt betrayed by reason, by high art and cultured taste, and by journalism and the mass media; thus Tzara, and other artists, viewed the work of Dada to be negative and destructive—to clear a path through the wreckage of tradition. Consider the

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[374] Richard Sheppard, *Modernism—Dada—Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois, 2000), p. 173.
[375] Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestoes*…, p. 5.
[376] Sheppard, *Modernism*…, p. 174.
[377] Kuenzli, *Dada*, pp. 16-17.

following passage from Tzara's "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love" (from 1920):

> A priori, in other words with its eyes closed, Dada places before action and above all: Doubt. DADA doubts everything. Dada is an armadillo. Everything is Dada, too. Beware of Dada.
>
> Anti-dadaism is a disease: selfkleptomania, man's normal condition, is DADA. But the real dadas are against DADA.[378]

Tzara's positive statements become negative, because it is impossible to realize them logically. They are primarily provocative: Dada—which forces the subject to be skeptical, and therefore to reflect on her condition—is a condition of health in a disease-ridden society, yet we should also "beware" of Dada, in order to guard against false hopes that may be exploited by the status quo.[379] Tzara continually steps back from his own practice, which allows him the distance afforded by irony; in this way, he demonstrates Dada's powerlessness in a violent and immoral society:

> I'm writing this manifesto to show that you can perform contrary actions at the same time, in one single, fresh breath; I am against action; as for continual contradiction, and affirmation too, I am neither for nor against them, and I won't explain myself because I hate common sense.[380]

Tzara's manifesto has a theatrical dimension—it is not purely literary, because one of Dada's aims was to destroy the assumption that words could refer to reality immediately. Kuenzli observes that this concept grounds the Dadaists' attacks on the mass media and communicative language.[381] Tzara's 1920 Manifesto states: " 'To launch a manifesto you have to want: A, B & C, and fulminate against 1, 2 & 3 […] I am writing a manifesto and there's nothing I want, and yet I am saying certain things, and in principle I am against manifestoes, as I am against principles.'"[382] Tzara knew that Dada must be anti-systematic; only in this way could it avoid exploitation by society's official culture. At

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[378] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 38.
[379] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 38.
[380] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 4.
[381] Kuenzli, *Dada*, pp. 16-20.
[382] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 20.

the same time, Dada had to take on the whole of modern society, because that society's very foundations were rotten. Yet the very things that the Dadaists despised in society—mechanization, immorality, misogyny, racism, bureaucratization, chauvinism, patriotism, war, violence, heroism—all had to be integrated within the artwork. Only in this way could the work reveal them to be false. How could any artwork accomplish this without falling into ideology, or simply disintegrating? The work itself had *to imitate the false society* that sought to embrace and assimilate it. For instance, the Berlin Dada group employed commercial language, and even pretended to be an advertising agency, in order to subvert and expose the predominant commercial culture of post-war Germany.[383] Another example is the Zurich Dadaists' embrace of performance art (dance, theatre and cabaret). Ball's record of the events of 1916 in his diary is astounding:

> Janco has made a number of masks for the new soiree.… They are reminiscent of the Japanese or ancient Greek theatre, yet they are wholly modern. […] We were all there when Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on. Then something strange happened. Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture, bordering on madness. […] The motive power of these masks was irresistibly conveyed to us. […] The masks simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance.[384]

Of course, this mimetic method entails certain risks. The so-called Neo-Dadaists and Pop Artists who modeled themselves after Dada, in the 1960s and after, arguably capitulated to capitalist ideology; instead of being critical of society, they embraced it.[385] Andy Warhol, asked to define Pop Art, replied simply, "It's liking things."[386] This affirmation would have been anathema to the Dadaists—and to Adorno. Kuenzli responds, "It is this fetishizing and aestheticizing of ordinary life that Duchamp described in his letter to Richter [when asked to comment on Neo-Dada as an artistic movement]."[387] Let us return to Tzara's 1918 Manifesto:

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[383] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 27.
[384] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 194.
[385] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 43.
[386] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 43.
[387] Kuenzli, *Dada*, p. 43.

> I assure you: there is no beginning, and we are not afraid; we aren't sentimental. We are like a raging wind that rips up the clothes of clouds and prayers, we are preparing the great spectacle of disaster, conflagration and decomposition. Preparing to put an end to mourning, and to replace tears by sirens spreading from one continent to another. […] I destroy the drawers of the brain…. Everything we look at is false.[388]

Like Adorno, Tzara accuses society of moral bankruptcy. Tzara also recognizes that traditional culture cannot be resurrected; after the violence of World War I, the hope that cultural categories (such as "Progress, Law, Morals") could safely guide society to deliverance was shattered.[389] Tzara concludes that art may only regenerate through negating its own immoral hypocrisy—that is, through destroying tradition and becoming anti-art. If society is "false," then those individuals and artworks caught up in social structures must become aware of the ways in which their experience has been distorted.[390]

If we accept Tzara's statement that, in place of traditional art, Dada will seek to present "disaster, conflagration and decomposition," then we might wonder what role the work of art will play in this "spectacle".[391] How could the artwork possibly be regarded as autonomous—which is necessary if art is to critically evaluate social convention, and if semblance is to appear—if there is no difference between an artwork and an ordinary object? Tzara declares:

> The poem pushes or digs a crater, is silent, murders, or shrieks along accelerated degrees of speed. It will no longer be a product of optics, sense or intelligence, but an impression or a means of transforming the tracks left by feelings.[392]

Consider the verbs that Tzara lists. He argues that Dadaist art should not be constricted by aesthetic judgment or taste, as Peter Dayan explains: "Any taste that you can define by critical or rational means is by definition a prison for poetry, that stops poetry advancing freely and prevents true creation." This is why Dada poetry is a method of altering the

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[388] Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestoes*…, p. 8.
[389] Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestoes*…, p. 8.
[390] Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestoes*…, p. 8.
[391] Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestoes*…, p. 8.
[392] Tristan Tzara, 'Note on Poetry', in Mary Ann Caws (ed), *Surrealist Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (London, England, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002), p. 414.

aftereffects of feelings—rather than being directly related to feeling or taste.[393] Further, although art for Tzara is autonomous, subjects cannot rationally articulate anything about its autonomy.[394] As a result, Dada is an anti-linguistic and anti-rational practice that aims to transcend any barriers that reason and culture might construct—barriers that ultimately strangle creativity and true freedom.[395]

Dada provided a historical—not a logical or transcendental—condition for the emergence of Surrealism. As Sarane Alexandrian observes,

> Without the Dada experience, surrealism would not have existed in the form in which we know it. It ran the risk of being a continuation of symbolism topped up with polemic. During the two years of Dada, the surrealists underwent a physical and spiritual training which allowed them thereafter to confront problems equipped with a knowledge of avant-garde struggle which they had not previously possessed. It is not true to say that surrealism was born after Dada, like a phoenix arising from its ashes. It was born during Dada, and became aware of its resources while it was in public action. Surrealism acquired a need to relate verbal or graphic delirium to an underlying cause, one less gratuitous than the total negation of everything.[396]

The problems that Alexandrian alludes to have their origin in the historical conditions of the times: the relation of form to material, the question of social conformity, how art should resist and negate its inheritance, the relation of art historical tradition to present reality, the feeling of collective social guilt, the question of how rationality could sanction social violence, and so on.[397] Dada and Surrealism are often related to one another as the negative and positive poles of a magnet: one cannot have one without the other. Instead, it seems more accurate to view each movement, using Adorno's language,

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[393] Tzara, 'Note on Poetry', p. 414.
[394] I am grateful to Professor Peter Dayan for this striking analysis of Dada (private correspondence).
[395] Thanks to Prof. Peter Dayan for this insight.
[396] Sarane Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art* (London and New York, 2012), p. 46.
[397] Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art*, p. 46.

as a force field that responded to its historical conditions with spontaneity, imagination, and insight.[398]

We have been discussing how Dadaist method (or anti-method) must work immanently within the totalized society in order to transform it, through allowing social awareness of the reified life that circulates in apparently innocuous tradition. Yet this account raises a question: how might Adorno's strict injunction that the modern artwork must remain autonomous cohere with those avant-garde movements that insist on anti-art's capacity for negation—which necessarily explodes the illusion of aesthetic autonomy, in order to transform life through aesthetic experience? Stewart Martin has grappled with this question, and many others, in his article "Autonomy and Anti-Art: Adorno's Concept of Avant-Garde Art."[399] His discussion demonstrates that philosophy requires art so that the former may test its own concepts and methods against the historical reality that artworks register and express. In the same manner, art requires philosophy so that artistic methods and techniques, often generated blindly or without the aid of rational reflection, may acquire experimental rigor, thus imparting to art an intensified power to resist and critique reality. This power arises when art becomes conscious of its own historical expression.

Martin observes that Adorno's principle that modern art must remain autonomous from society apparently would place such art against the "claims of anti-art."[400] However, Martin continues, aesthetic autonomy is itself "mediated" by anti-art, and requires the latter for its "reflexive form."[401] Most importantly, Martin argues that, if aesthetic autonomy is not to be merely beholden to tradition, it must acquire a critical capacity for the radical refusal of ideology—specifically, determinate negation—which is present in the avant-garde's anti-art. Martin writes: "In relation to art's autonomy, the new is the site of the constitution of art's autonomy through the determinate negation of tradition.

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[398] AT, p. 237.
[399] Stewart Martin, 'Autonomy and Anti-Art: Adorno's Concept of Avant-Garde Art', *Constellations*, 7 (2000), pp. 197-207.
[400] Martin, 'Autonomy and Anti-Art…', p. 197.
[401] Martin, 'Autonomy and Anti-Art…', p. 197.

[…] Despite its ambivalence, the new presents a critical impulse against this ideology of traditionalism…".[402]

Martin argues that autonomy, if it is to resist the authority of tradition and become a critical force able to produce new art, must employ the negation present in anti-art—even if such anti-art also involves a claim to "anti-autonomy," or heteronomy—namely, the deadly exposure to social poison that we may discern in Dadaist works: "Anti-art is the anti-traditional form which art must necessarily risk if its autonomy is not to depend merely upon the authority of tradition."[403] Martin suggests, correctly, that aesthetic autonomy that merely reproduced what was already present in tradition would be the death, and sterilization, of new art, since the new must critically hold to account, and negate, the reified life that congeals in culture that strives to repress actual historical experience. Thus, if aesthetic autonomy is to resist tradition, and the totalized society, it must contain its own antidote within itself: the radical negation of anti-art.

Martin's analysis suggests that modern art must carry out a delicate balancing act between its power to remain independent from society and its power to immanently critique society through proximity. Yet balance is only achieved (in Hegelian fashion) when the artwork works through its extremes—rather than attempting to find a moderate compromise. Autonomy becomes a force of conservative ideology when its commitment to independence is untethered from any critical and interrogative force; for this reason, modern art must be guided by anti-artistic impulses.[404] Anti-art becomes regressive, however, when it denies that the sphere of the aesthetic has its own logic, and when the particularity of the artwork is coerced by the social totality.

Martin analyses Dada's impulse toward disintegration and renewal as two distinct forms of anti-art: "anti-art as the affirmation of non-art" and "anti-art as anti-tradition."[405] The first form demonstrates that Dada has a positive moment. Dada's positivity, however, is only perceived via negation; like Adorno's concept of utopia, its primary value is to illuminate the shocking reality of false life that governs the social totality. The second form of anti-art, anti-tradition, is necessary so that Dada is not perceived as an

[402] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 198.
[403] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 198.
[404] Martin, 'Autonomy…', pp. 198-199.
[405] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 199.

arbitrary, irrational, or spontaneous outpouring of vitriol, untethered to the ideology of the past; on the contrary, Dada's anti-traditional stance demonstrates the historical experience which anti-art manifests—as well as its critical and focussed expression, which philosophy clarifies and reflects upon. Martin quotes from *En Avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus*, cited in eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 259-60[406]:

> Dada foresees its end and laughs. Death is a thoroughly Dadaist business, in that it signifies nothing at all. Dada has the right to dissolve itself and will exert this right when the time comes. With a businesslike gesture, freshly pressed pants, a shave and a haircut, it will go down to the grave, after having made suitable arrangements with the Thanatos Funeral Home.[407]

We can perceive the anti-artistic impulse of Dada, as well as its autonomous and critical capacity, in these lines. Dada is figured as the proto-typical bourgeois male businessman: the investment banker or stockbroker who calculates his own demise with rational and unemotional precision. Such a submission to nature is permissible only through civilization: immaculate trousers, "a shave and a haircut."[408] This gesture demonstrates the mimetic nature of Dada, which identifies with the social poison against which it protests. At the same time, the lines confirm that anti-art contains a hidden and deadly critical means: the affirmation of death, which expresses that even the reign of the capitalist bourgeoisie, which seems eternal, will eventually die. Dada's anti-artistic stance is also confirmed through its nihilism. Dada's death will signify "nothing"—because such death is nothing other than Dada's commodification and assimilation to convention.[409] In anticipating such assimilation, Dada implies that its death will be necessary in order to escape becoming what it most despises: stale and static tradition or convention.

Martin's discussion of the composition of avant-garde art explains how the mimetic impulse of anti-art toward society is able to retain its critical and autonomous stance towards social evil—and, conversely, how modern art's autonomy determinately

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[406] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 205, footnote 7.
[407] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 200.
[408] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 200.
[409] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 200.

negates tradition. Martin thus explains how avant-garde art relates to the past; in this way, he develops an account of aesthetic temporality that shows how art may both remain within tradition, in order to imitate it, while also seeking to explode the false security and empty consolation that tradition imparts. Aesthetic autonomy must not merely recapitulate the claims of the past; new works demand a new kind of autonomy:

> Rather than abstractly negating art's autonomy, anti-art's rejection of its consolatory function actually converges with the critical emancipation from authority that is the original impulse of art's autonomy. Through this convergence, anti-art is integrated as a critical mediation of art's autonomy, which is crucial if autonomy is to avoid reverting to tradition and thereby betraying its critical impulse in the manner outlined in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*….[410]

Martin also delimits the historical composition of those works that mediate anti-art and autonomy. We call these artworks *modern* because it is only with the onset of a particularly virulent form of instrumentality that anti-art is called upon to negate conventional autonomy; and, only in modernity would artworks' autonomy be subject to determinate negation:

> The idea that art must negate itself in order to maintain itself institutes the insistent anti-traditionalism of Adorno's concept of avant-garde art's historical temporality: its modernism. For Adorno, the new transforms traditionalism's foundationalism of the past into the paradoxically anti-foundational foundation of the destruction of tradition. In this sense, the new becomes normative for art."[411]

The new thus does not merely indicate an empty place in the future, and it is not simply the transference of genius from the subject to the object. Rather, the new negates the past: it preserves and transforms those aspects of tradition that still breathe, and it orients the subject's reflection on artworks produced in the shadow of the past.[412] In this sense, anti-art is able to produce a new form of "critical autonomy" that allows artworks to remain

[410] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 203.
[411] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 203.
[412] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 204.

porous to the threatening social whole while at the same time capable of resisting it.[413] Thus, in Hegelian fashion, art must transcend its concept in order to remain true to it.

[413] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 204.

Section Two: Kant's Concepts of the Creative Imagination and the Artistic Genius

Now, we must return to theoretical issues. We can now examine Kant's concept of genius and the productive imagination, which Adorno responds to with his concept of mimetic comportment. While Adorno recognizes that there must be a particular orientation that the artist takes towards the object, he does not want to privilege a kind of orientation that ignores the unique qualities of the material in order to advance her own ends. William Desmond, in his article "Kant and the Terror of Genius: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism," draws our attention to a central paradox in Kant's philosophy: "How can nature be both: Given the law and yet law-giver? How can the self be both: Giver of the law, and agent of the law-giver as other? If we give the rule to nature, how then can nature out of itself give rules to us?".[414] In other words, Kant's concept of nature appears to oscillate between activity and passivity. In this section, I will examine this tension. Desmond argues that the Kantian subject is irreparably split into two factions that cannot cooperate with each other: reason actively legislates, while nature remains merely passive. Kant might answer this objection by remarking that such a divide simply describes the composition of the subject, which is necessary in order to construct knowledge of appearances; and he might remark that the split is partially overcome through the mediating activity of the productive imagination, which acts to bridge the faculties.[415] Adorno might contend that the divide clearly indicates the subject's repression of internal nature, which damages subjectivity.[416] Kant might attempt to assuage Desmond's worry by granting understanding certain powers that sensibility cannot have: for instance, the power to form experience, and to restrain reason's extravagant musings on the unconditioned. In other words, the faculties are unequal in power: lawful reason controls unlawful nature.

Desmond goes on to argue that the subject may produce otherness or difference from within herself. In this manner, according to Desmond, the experience of genius, or

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[414] William Desmond, 'Kant and the Terror…', p. 595.

[415] Sarah L. Gibbons, *Kant's Theory of Imagination: Bridging Gaps in Judgment and Experience* (Oxford, 1994).
[416] AT, p. 81.

the creative imagination, may subvert the Enlightenment principles procured by understanding and reason: "The terror of genius surfaces relative to the emergence of some power that does *not fit* into this way of thinking...genius seems to erupt into the self-sufficient circle of self-defining autonomy, as a kind of emissary of something *other*".[417] That is, the subject may have a metaphysical experience through unleashing the productive or creative imagination. Although Desmond places too much faith in the Kantian productive imagination—which ought to be amended to an account of how the imagination may receive the unconscious in striking and unpredictable ways—I think that his account of otherness within the subject is plausible.

Kant's idea that the artistic genius may express spontaneity through spirit has not fared well in the twentieth century. In the face of the various social maladies of modern history—mass murder, torture, prejudice and racism, war, and technological advancement that increases humanity's destructive potential—the notion that the subject may attain metaphysical knowledge of her own spiritual freedom seems archaic and hopelessly naïve. Of the First World War, Kershaw writes: "More than any other conflict, [World War One] was a war of industrialized mass slaughter. Human flesh stood against killing machines. Facing soldiers were heavy artillery, machine guns, quick-firing rifles, trench mortars, high explosives, grenades, flamethrowers and poison gas".[418] In the face of such terrifying technology, the traditional virtues of courage, sacrifice, honor, and patriotic duty seem obsolete and empty. The concept of individual freedom fails to take into account the crushing forces of society and culture that repress human conscience, and which all too often dictate human behavior and action.

Philosophical thought must acknowledge historical experience because, without historical experience, philosophy would remain unaware of the historical and social forces that direct rationality. So, let us briefly turn to Friedlander's account of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Friedlander fights against reification by foregrounding the individual and personal stories of the victims and survivors of Nazi Germany.[419] This

[417] Desmond, 'Kant and the Terror…', p. 601.
[418] Kershaw, *To Hell and Back…*, p. 45.
[419] Friedlander, *The Years of Persecution…*, p. 5.

constitutes part of his method. Friedlander recognizes that individual voices are more powerful and expressive than statistics:

> From the moment the victims were engulfed in the process leading to the 'Final Solution,' their collective life—after a short period of enhanced cohesion—started to disintegrate. Soon this collective history merged with the history of administrative and murderous measures of their extermination, and with its abstract statistical expression. The only concrete history that can be retrieved remains that carried by personal stories. From the stage of collective disintegration to that of deportation and death, this history, in order to be written at all, has to be represented as the integrated narration of individual fates.[420]

Individual stories are not mere illustrations or examples; rather, they form the qualitative and material current that binds historical experience together. Friedlander observes that, after Hitler ascended to power on January 30, 1933,

> [t]he philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin left Berlin for Paris on March 18. Two days later he wrote to his colleague and friend, Gershom Scholem, who lived in Palestine: 'I can at least be certain that I did not act on impulse…Nobody among those who are close to me judges the matter differently.' […] The conductors Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter were compelled to flee. Walter was forbidden access to his Leipzig orchestra, and, as he was about to conduct a special concert of the Berlin Philharmonic, he was informed that, according to rumors circulated by the Propaganda Ministry, the hall of the Philharmonic would be burned down if he did not withdraw. Walter left the country.[421]

Art was traditionally conceived of as a refuge for qualitative uniqueness and sacredness. However, in Nazi Germany, and late-capitalist America, qualitative experience was severely damaged. After slavery, imperialism, capitalism, fascism, and the two world wars—among the most harrowing historical crises in nineteenth and twentieth century

[420] Friedlander, *The Years of Persecution…*, p. 5.
[421] Friedlander, *The Years of Persecution…*, p. 9.

modern life—the subject who denies that history affects subjectivity, and that philosophical reflection is constrained by historical events, effectively denies her own experience. Further, what is often described as elite art and high culture cannot escape reification and commodification; thus the idea that the genius is unaffected by historical and social forces is another example of reification. Let us now turn to Kant's concept of the genius in the third *Critique*.

For Kant, freedom is a regulative idea that guides action; as a result, the subject cannot experience freedom in the empirical world.[422] Kant conceives of freedom as a supernatural or noumenal causality that allows the subject to found moral laws (and to act in accordance with them), to make moral judgments, and to act spontaneously (that is, without any sort of heterogeneous determination that might restrict her will). In addition, freedom (which manifests itself in artistic experience as genius) allows the artist to break with tradition or convention and to create new rules, which may establish new models for other artists to follow.[423] The concept of genius perpetuates a dualistic model of the self that does not allow for any interaction between subject and object. Further, Kant's concept of genius reifies freedom and nature, because it claims that they are metaphysically or substantially identical to each other. Such identity is static because Kant claims that the genius remains independent of any material conditions that might affect, cause, or cooperate with it. So freedom cannot change (either positively through becoming or negatively through regression); it remains a metaphysical postulate that is immune from challenge. For this reason, political freedom—the freedom of a society—and historical freedom—the freedom that grows or is limited as natural, historical, and social conditions also change—cannot be meaningfully described for Kant, since they exist in the merely empirical realm. As a result, freedom remains totally abstracted from the material domain, and becomes an empty concept, without any empirical or intuitive

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[422] For a brief discussion of the problem of nature and freedom in Kant's third *Critique*, see Dusing, 'Beauty as the Transition…', p. 89. He claims that the free play of the faculties "rests on" the rational idea of the supersensible substrate of humanity; as a result, aesthetic judgment allows the subject to bridge nature and freedom.
[423] Desmond, 'Kant and the Terror…'.

content. If freedom is without concretion, it can neither resist nor affect materiality, and hence remains unaltered by anything except its own abstract activity.[424]

In the third *Critique*, Kant states: "*Genius* is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art. Since talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature, we could also put it this way: *Genius* is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) *through which* nature gives the rule to art."[425] Both talent and genius are given by nature to subjectivity; both are "productive" or spontaneous abilities, and hence are not merely mechanical or material, according to Kant.[426] Genius is not a skill that can be taught; it is a purely innate capacity.[427] The last sentence in the passage means: through genius, nature produces a rule or criterion for artists; in this way, nature proves its freedom, because the rule is not determined by any previous rules or by any material context. Nature provides a model for artists to imitate (in artistic creation) in the same way that (in moral judgment) subjective freedom gives the rule to nature. So although genius is a "natural endowment," it is liberating rather than restrictive, contrary to Kant's earlier casting of nature as inherently empty of cognitive significance or subjective agency.[428]

Kant continues: "Genius is a *talent* for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other; hence the foremost property of genius must be *originality*."[429] In this passage, Kant confirms that genius is nothing other than the spontaneous production of a rule. Genius cannot be mechanical, and hence cannot derive from empirical factors, on Kant's account, because in that case the rules produced by genial activity could be predicted or calculated in advance, and could not be considered products of freedom.[430] Kant is wrestling with the problem of how subjectivity

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[424] See O'Connor, 'Freedom Within Nature…'.
[425] CJ, Section 46, Ak. 307, p. 174.
[426] CJ, Section 46, Ak. 307, p. 174.
[427] CJ, Section 46, Ak. 307, p. 174.
[428] CJ, Section 46, Ak. 307, p. 174.
[429] CJ, Section 46, Ak. 307-308, p. 175.
[430] Bradley Murray, 'Kant on Genius and Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 47 (April 2007), p. 200. Murray argues that Kant has two concepts of genius: first, "Kant's 'nature's

could interact with objectivity if freedom and nature are considered metaphysically distinct. The latter problem plagues transcendental idealism because Kant's system recognizes two different domains of experience that are necessarily divorced from each other. Kant's solution, in the Introduction to the third *Critique*, is to propose a form of judgment that is reflective.[431] Kant retains his definition of freedom: a rational idea that is completely spontaneous, independent of materiality and empirical content, and yet which is capable of affecting empirical phenomena. The account of reflective judgment does not amend the fact that the subject remains able to constitute the object, which is conceived of as lacking agency.[432] Kant obscures the actual composition of nature and freedom, and therefore entrenches the divide between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. A better solution, elaborated by Adorno in his concept of natural history, would be to view freedom as partially composed of materiality, and as inextricably bound up with empirical contexts; and to view nature as composed of spontaneity, and as inextricably bound up with freedom. In other words: freedom is not wholly spontaneous, and nature is not wholly mechanical—they are instead interrelated. This solution is admittedly dialectical, and so relies on principles that Kant would not accept. However, Kant's system produces contradictions that cannot be reconciled with each other, or even properly reflected upon using the methods of transcendental idealism (because philosophical reflection for Kant employs reason, which must be immanently criticized if it is to enable mimetic comportment), and so another model is necessary.[433] Kant's concept of freedom can no longer be defended, because materiality remains a condition of subjective experience. The attempt to subtract materiality from philosophical cognition is unethical after the historical catastrophes of the Enlightenment period—and our own

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elect' notion of genius" and, second, the "notion [that] genius is […] a 'productive faculty' of the mind".

[431] Matthews, 'Kant's Sublime…', p. 166. She argues that judgments of the sublime and judgments of taste both involve reflective disinterested judgment. In this way, both are bound to moral judgment.

[432] Desmond, 'Kant and the Terror…', Mapp, 'No Nature…', Huhn, 'The Kantian Sublime…'.

[433] For an excellent analysis of the antagonisms and contradictions in Kant's third *Critique*, and an overall argument about agency in aesthetic experience, see Ayon Maharaj, *The Dialectics of Aesthetic Agency: Reevaluating German Aesthetics From Kant to Adorno* (London and New York, 2013).

time; it amounts to repressing suffering. Kant cannot account for the fact that objectivity is capable of expression (that is, it has agency of its own), while remaining distinct from subjectivity, and also that freedom is partially natural, and not only spontaneous.[434]

Desmond alludes to a related paradox in Kant's concept of the genius but does not pursue it. The paradox is that Kant's concept of the creative imagination contradicts or subverts his concept of taste or aesthetic judgment. If creative imagination is able to spontaneously produce new artistic forms or models, then it must have an unlimited power to generate images that may overwhelm aesthetic judgment. Since aesthetic judgment by definition is constrained by the interplay or balance between imagination and understanding—that is, by maintaining stasis and harmony—then it will be unable to resist the imagination's power of production, and to respond to the new.[435] Desmond indicates this when he writes about the "terror" of genius, but he doesn't discuss the relation of imagination to taste.[436] If creative imagination is spontaneous, then it must continually challenge taste to accommodate its new forms or models. What if taste falls short—just like imagination in the judgment of the sublime? What happens when aesthetic judgment cannot rationally determine new imaginative forms? Does the subject then experience the sublime, or simply disorientation or terror? The confusion generated by this problem constitutes another reason why Kant's model of creative imagination and taste are incompatible, and why the model of harmonious aesthetic judgment does not allow true artistic freedom.

One might argue that Kant recognizes the artwork's capacity for truthful expression in the doctrine of aesthetic ideas. Let me argue briefly against this claim. An aesthetic idea cannot count as expression in Adorno's sense.[437] Also, aesthetic ideas

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[434] See Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…'. In his lectures on the first *Critique*, Adorno charges Kant with disobeying the prohibition on employing pure concepts to yield knowledge of nature of the absolute—that is, Kant is guilty of "construct[ing] something from pure thought". Adorno, *Kant's* Critique…, p. 217.

[435] Thanks for Prof. Peter Dayan for pointing out to me that any rational definition of aesthetic judgment automatically restricts the creative freedom of the artist or poet. This is why the Dadaists, according to Dayan, rejected any linguistic definition of art.

[436] Desmond, 'Kant and the Terror…', pp. 595-601.

[437] Kirk Pillow, 'Understanding Aestheticized', in Rebecca Kukla (ed), *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 246, 251. He argues that

correspond to rational ideas, and so are dependent upon that which they should, ideally, critique. In other words, aesthetics should extend philosophy through showing its limitations: its dependence on nature. Aesthetic ideas cannot criticize the hegemonic influence that certain forms of rationality have imposed on nature because they participate in the same instrumentality. For instance, the aesthetic idea of an eagle might correspond to the rational idea of patriotism. How would such an aesthetic idea reveal that the rational idea to which it corresponds is an illusion, or has become meaningless in modern times, because it is subject to ideological distortion (for instance, the fact that patriotism and nationalism are both grounded in xenophobia and racism)? Is there any way that an aesthetic idea might reveal a rational idea (for instance, freedom, love, humanity, beauty, truth) to be empty, corrupted, or a mere placeholder for its opposite (hatred, inhumanity, coercion, ugliness, falsity)? Finally, aesthetic and rational ideas must not be susceptible to historical or social influence, and so they remain, according to Kant, eternally valid—the products of sensibility and rationality that cannot reflect on their own capacity. For this reason aesthetic and rational ideas cannot manifest or illuminate the subject's particular experience, which remains historical, social, cultural, and natural to the core.

Adorno's Concept of Expression

Given the difficulties with Kant's concept of the creative imagination, we must now turn to Adorno's concept of expression. The concepts of expression and creativity, although opposed in many ways, share several features: both describe a kind of comportment towards aesthetic material; both examine the relations between the artist, the artwork, and historical techniques; both are grounded in nature; and both remain the locus of freedom in aesthetic experience.

"Art is expressive when what is objective, subjectively mediated, speaks, whether this be sadness, energy, or longing."[438] Expression does not refer to the mental state of the

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aesthetic ideas enable a holistic perspective on experience, and that Kantian reflective judgment is a condition for determinate judgment.

[438] AT, p. 146.

artist or the aesthetic subject; on the contrary, it names historical and social layers that attempt to break through the confinement imposed upon them. For Foster, expression indicates that concepts and artworks may show more than they can say.[439] Because concepts and artworks accrue historical and social meaning as they exist in the empirical world, such concepts and works manifest layers of experience that may be expressed but which cannot be conceptually or discursively represented: "The expression of experiential substance in concepts is concerned with the intrinsically historical meanings that are picked up by the concept via relations of contiguity and proximity."[440] Expression occurs when the artwork registers the divide between subject and object in experience: "Expression is the suffering countenance of artworks. They turn this countenance only toward those who return its gaze."[441] The feeling of pleasure is replaced by the awareness of suffering. Although the artwork may allow the subject a glimpse of happiness, the end of aesthetic experience is not pleasure.[442] The subject must follow the object: "If expression were merely the doubling of the subjectively felt, it would be null and void...Rather than such feelings, the model of expression is that of extra-artistic things and situations. Historical processes and functions are already sedimented in them and speak out of them".[443] Artworks that merely reproduce empirical reality are uncritical and therefore are void of truth.

There are several other parallels between Kant's concept of the creative imagination and Adorno's concept of expression.

First, Kantian imagination manifests the subject's freedom and spontaneity. Kant, in Section 49 of the *Critique of Judgment*, discusses the imagination's role in artistic creation:

> *Spirit* [*Geist*] in an aesthetic sense is the animating principle in the mind. But what this principle uses to animate [or quicken] the soul, the material it employs for this, is what imparts to the mental powers a purposive momentum, i.e., imparts

[439] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery*…, pp. 4-5.
[440] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery*…, pp. 4-5.
[441] AT, p. 146.
[442] Duttmann, 'A Second Life…', pp. 5-6.
[443] AT, pp. 146-147.

> to them a play which is such that it sustains itself on its own and even strengthens the powers for such play.[444]

Spirit is a capacity that enlivens the mental powers and places them in motion.[445] Such animation allows reason the freedom to reflect on indeterminate objects, and allows imagination to produce aesthetic ideas.[446]

For Kant, the subject's creative imagination expresses spontaneity; for Adorno, the object's voice expresses historical experience, and traces of unrealized possibility. Adorno emphasizes that mimetic comportment, which results in expression, relies on spontaneity that is always directed by objectivity (defined as historical and social experience). Thus mimesis reveals the aesthetic object's capacity for agency and freedom, which is expressed negatively in truth content. The concept of expression redirects the concepts of creativity and productivity away from abstract subjectivity and towards the historical material within the subject. In the end, however, despite his insistence on objectivity, Adorno validates subjectivity more truthfully than Kant does, because, for Adorno, expression can only be realized when the traces of objective damage within the subject are acknowledged and reflected upon. That which Kant calls subjectivity is in reality nothing more than a façade: freedom that distances itself from its own conditions of possibility. Adorno suggests that the artist must divest her will of rational control, and must renounce her claim to actively determine the object; instead, she follows the object's direction. Zuidervaart confirms that the artist's "[u]nconscious experience" involves "spontaneity" which is "a sediment of collective reactions".[447] Thus individual freedom depends on social and cultural freedom. Adorno writes: "Aesthetic rationality must plunge blindfolded into the making of the work rather than directing it externally as an act of reflection over the artwork".[448] For Kant, creative genius is nature in the subject; for Adorno, expression involves technique.[449] According to Bernstein,

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[444] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 313, pp. 181-182.
[445] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 313, pp. 181-182.
[446] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 313-314, pp. 181-183.
[447] Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 116-124.
[448] AT, p. 151.
[449] AT, p. 149.

"Technique is the explicit means by which the mimetic impulse is released...Art is mimetic only as objective expression."[450] In other words, mimetic comportment requires rationality in order to achieve expression in the artwork. Thus mimetic comportment expresses nature through artifice; it cannot be conceived as entirely spontaneous because it is always engaged in evaluating how the weight of tradition may give rise to new techniques and configurations of material.

Second, the Kantian imagination is creative; yet Adorno's concept of expression is receptive. Adorno inverts tradition because the Kantian concept is overly subjective; thus, the concept of expression must be oriented towards the object. Kant holds that "imagination ([in its role] as a productive cognitive power) is very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it."[451] Thus, the productive imagination is able to transform or "restructure" intuition in a certain way.[452] The result of such transformation is that intuition cannot be determined by the understanding. The power of the imagination does not involve its receptivity to the object; rather, it overrides the object's voice in order to impose its own narrative upon the object. This is why the creative imagination ultimately supersedes objectivity, and why Adorno cannot accept Kant's account. Kant suggests that the intuition is structured into an extremely rich or dense material that may be considered akin to rational ideas. The transformed material provokes the subject to try to exhibit its infinite meaning (that is, to connect intuition and concept in order to produce knowledge). What results is an aesthetic idea.

For Adorno, aesthetic expression manifests truth through the artwork's imitation of objectivity (namely, historical and social experience that has been repressed). Mimetic comportment allows the artist proximity to social-historical reality, and forces her to encounter otherness or nonidentity—that which transcends social immanence. Engagement with repressed material gradually allows the subject a measure of freedom;

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[450] Bernstein *The Fate of Art*…, p. 215.
[451] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 314, p. 182.
[452] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 314, p. 182.

instead of forcing her faculties to act in rigid and habitual ways, the subject opens herself up to new experiences.

Third, both Kantian aesthetic imagination and Adornian mimetic comportment seek to present something that understanding or reason cannot comprehend. Kant describes the interaction between imagination and reason:

> Now if a concept is provided with [*unterlegen*] a presentation of the imagination such that…it prompts…so much thought as can never be comprehended within a determinate concept and thereby the presentation aesthetically expands the concept itself in an unlimited way, then the imagination is creative in [all of] this and sets the power of intellectual ideas (i.e., reason) in motion….[453]

In other words, the imagination procures an image that exhibits a concept. The image, however, is not exhausted in the exhibited concept; instead, the image is so powerful that it causes reason to think.[454] Rational cognition, which cannot be exhibited or conceptualized, enlarges the concept. The imagination is thus creative because it does not proceed according to the understanding's rules or according to reason's demands, but produces images from out of itself.[455] The imagination, in this sense, is able to *think*.

For Adorno, expression unearths the "nonsubjective in the subject".[456] Hence it relates to objectivity—repressed nature and forgotten historical or cultural experience.

> Expression approaches the transsubjective; it is the form of knowledge that—having preceded the polarity of subject and object—does not recognize this polarity as definitive. Art is secular, however, in that it attempts to achieve such knowledge within the bounds of the polarity of subject and object, as an act of autonomous spirit. Aesthetic expression is the objectification of the non-objective...[457]

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[453] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 314-315, p. 183.
[454] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 314-315, p. 183.
[455] CJ, Section 49, Ak. 314-315, pp. 182-183.
[456] AT, p. 148.
[457] AT, p. 146.

Artworks trace possibility through technique. Expression reveals what is not identical with the subject's categories. The result of expression—the formed material of the work—is not formed by subjectivity, but social-historical spirit: "However much the expressed resembles the subject, however much the impulses are those of the subject, they are at the same time apersonal, participating in the integrative power of the ego without ever becoming identical with it."[458] Expressive impulses, mediated through the subject, reflect objective factors: the constraints of tradition, historical violence, social oppression, and the obsolescence of culture.[459] The impulses are not identical with the subject's ego because they signify what cannot be integrated within it: unconscious nature.

Adorno's Argument Against Kant's Doctrine of Imagination

The concept of expression critically responds to Kant's idea of the imagination, in both its reproductive and productive variants. Instead, for Adorno, aesthetic imagination must be mimetic, or receptive to the object.[460] Adorno's critique is important for several reasons.

After the horrors of the twentieth century, and its failed social revolutions, only artworks may critique ideology: philosophy remains bound to conceptuality; moral judgment is entangled with power and violence; and political reason is instrumental rather than utopian.[461] Thus, Kant's principle that the creative imagination remains ahistorical and anti-cognitive should be challenged. As argued above, aesthetic experience incites philosophical thought because the subject grasps nonidentity through reflection. Thus, in order to attain aesthetic truth through philosophical thought, we must embrace Adorno's critique of Kant. The imagination is related to philosophical reflection,

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[458] AT, p. 148.
[459] AT, p. 148.

460 Christoph Bode, '"To impose is not to discover": A Romantic-Modernist Continuity in Contradiction', in Richard T. Gray, Nicholas Halmi, Gary J. Handwerk, Michael A. Rosenthal, Klaus Vieweg (eds.), *Inventions of the Imagination: Romanticism and Beyond* (Seattle, Washington, 2011), pp. 159-160.
[461] Wellmer, 'Adorno, Modernity…', p. 113. See also Adorno's 'Introduction' to ND.

and to receptive experience, rather than to subjective creativity or productivity. Kant's conception of the productive imagination claims to be concrete, because aesthetic ideas express a manifold of intuition that is incomprehensible to understanding or reason. For Adorno, however, the Kantian imagination is abstract, because it cuts itself off from historical experience, and because it covers over its object through willful invention. For instance, according to Kant, aesthetic ideas symbolize rational ideas (such as freedom, God, immortality, love, death). Yet rational ideas may easily become ideological because they are never tested against the reality of human experience itself; they remain isolated from social-historical materiality. As long as rational ideas are invoked as ideals, they cannot represent historical experience in late capitalist modernity. As a consequence, aesthetic ideas are constructed at a distance from such experience itself. Productive imagination only 'produces' that which the subject already knows: that which she tries to theorize by applying metaphors to reason's speculative thought, which remains empty, even when the rational ideas are represented aesthetically. In addition, for Kant, objectivity must be excluded from aesthetic experience in order to preserve its autonomy. Kant's philosophy claims to ground the subject's freedom; in reality, however, such freedom represses material impulses, which reason cannot account for. Imagination manifests the subject's freedom; thus it cannot be driven by natural impulses.

Kant's philosophy is caught in a contradiction: on the one hand, the subject requires materiality so that experience has content; on the other hand, Kant is forced to exclude materiality from experience, because it remains outside the realm of appearances. Adorno notes that, for Kant, "[t]he possibility of the objective knowledge of things really leads to an insight into constitutive subjectivity, and conversely, you arrive at the objective existence of things only through these subjective factors."[462] This idealist approach is not appropriate, because it leads to formalism and to a model of reason that damages itself. Reason without nature is formal: that is, it cannot cognize intrinsic value, and it denies its own composition. Yet reason is affected by nature and history.

Creativity for Kant brings about pleasure and harmony: the imagination and understanding freely play with each other, as in the judgment of taste. Kant's ideal of harmonious interaction ignores the reality that, due to the alienation effected by

462 Adorno, *Kant's* Critique…, p. 94.

capitalism, the faculties have been wrenched apart from each other, and cannot attain a reconciled synthetic bond, in which each faculty responds cooperatively with another. The mind has been divorced from itself.

Although the Surrealists emphasized the marvelous, they were acutely aware of the hellish crises of the twentieth century. For example, consider Andre Breton's discussion of how a poetic image is constructed: "man does not evoke them [Surrealist images]; rather they 'come to him spontaneously, despotically. He cannot chase them away; for the will is powerless now and no longer controls the faculties'."[463] Breton continues that the imagination, when it constructs a poetic image, has "seized nothing consciously. It is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, *the light of the image*…. The value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors."[464] Breton's use of electrical and mechanical metaphors signal that he is attempting to use the fixtures of industrial-capitalist society against itself—to incite the social totality to self-consciousness. Surrealism acquired this method from Dada. For Breton, the subject is not in control of herself; she is haunted and pursued by poetic images that appear in defiance of her rational will, and which assert connections between items of experience untethered by rational or logical grounds. The "value of the image" does not depend on anything that the subject might grant or impose; rather, it depends on the objective potentiality of the image itself: the layers of material history, and unconscious associations, embedded in each term.[465] The "light of the image" is free from the subject's creativity, or her rational cognition; the subject merely "tak[es] note of, and apprec[iates], the luminous phenomenon."[466]

By contrast, Kantian pleasure amounts to empty consolation because the subject is not engaged in historical reality.[467] Adorno and Kant have different accounts of how subjectivity and objectivity interact. For Kant the creative imagination is spontaneous; for

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[463] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, 1972), p. 36. Breton tells us that the quote is from Baudelaire.
[464] Breton, *Manifestoes*…, p. 37.
[465] Breton, *Manifestoes*…, p. 37.
[466] Breton, *Manifestoes*…, p. 37.
[467] AT, pp. 2, 50.

Adorno expression involves mimetic comportment.[468] Kant argues that genius must be conceived as nature because it grounds freedom, and is capable of originating new techniques. However, for Adorno, the subject's artistic activity should not be considered entirely spontaneous because it is always engaged in evaluating the weight of tradition (artistic material) with various impulses toward new techniques and configurations. That is, history and society constrain and guide the artist's hand, and limit her productive freedom. Wellmer[469] explains that Adorno responds in different ways to Kant's conception of nature:

> The 'remembrance of nature in the subject' which the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* had already postulated as a figure of reconciliation between spirit and nature, assumes an ambiguous meaning in the later Adorno's critique of Kant's critical metaphysics. This 'remembrance' no longer only signifies the emphatic hope for a resurrection of nature in the medium of spirit, but also, at the same time, man's being 'surrendered' (*verfallen*) to nature, that is, the fragility, finitude, and non-utopian materiality of spirit.[470]

Kant and Adorno have fundamentally different conceptions of nature. Kant conceives of nature as a heterogeneous force, as well as the ground of freedom; Adorno conceives of nature as the realm of instincts and desires—that is, it is a material source that reason cannot control without harming itself. Kant is unable to account for the complex relationship between reason and materiality because he reduces the object to a mere product of subjective activity. In addition, Kant retains a naïve conception of nature in the section on the artistic genius: that nature is fundamentally pure and unmediated by reason, culture, or history. This positivist conception of nature relies on the reductionist assumption that biological reality is autonomous from social and historical reality. In his lectures on *Aesthetics*, Adorno examines the contradictions within the artwork: "…[o]n the one hand, art exits the realm of nature, and in that sense constitutes the absolute opposite of everything merely natural. […] On the other hand, art is itself the manifestation of nature in a world where nature has alienated itself through a mighty and

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[468] CJ, p. 175; AT, pp. 149-150.
[469] Wellmer, 'Adorno, Modernity…'.
[470] Wellmer, 'Adorno, Modernity…', p. 117.

irreversible process. It is…the self-alienated manifestation of nature…".[471] Nature only appears within the artwork as mediated by history and reason—that is, as damaged, suffering particularity. Adorno continues:

> …one of the substantial intentions of important works of art is not only to push nature away, to distinguish themselves from nature, to distinguish themselves from the merely natural through sublimation, but also to give nature back what belongs to it. […] every dissonance is a small remembrance of the suffering which the control over nature, and ultimately a society of domination as such, inflicts on nature, and only in the form of this suffering, only in the form of yearning—and dissonance is always substantially yearning and suffering—only thus can suppressed nature find its voice at all.[472]

Thus, the modern artwork must relate to nature in two contradictory ways—which both follow and break from Kant's conception of nature.[473] First, the artwork must sublimate (that is, transform or metamorphose) the merely natural (that is, ideology, or convention that has been uncritically inherited) through reflection; second, the artwork must present nature's suffering (which results from nonidentity), so that reason may reflect on its own repressive activity. Adorno's argument against Kantian autonomy recognizes how the relationship between the individual and society has changed in the twentieth century. In order to criticize Kant's conception of experience, it is necessary to overcome it by employing Kantian methods against Kantian aims.

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[471] Adorno, *Aesthetics*…, p. 49.
[472] Adorno, *Aesthetics*…, p. 39.
[473] CJ, Section 46, Ak. 308, p. 175.

Chapter Four: Interpretation as Metaphysical Experience

"Involuntarily and unconsciously, the observer enters into a contract with the work, agreeing to submit to it on condition that it speak. In the pledged receptivity of the observer, pure-self-abandonment—that moment of free exhalation in nature—survives."[474]

Adorno's engagement with the Kantian and post-Kantian philosophical tradition allows him to invert that tradition's significance for modern philosophical aesthetics. In this chapter we will focus on Adorno's concept of interpretation, and on the question of how philosophy and art relate to each other—and why they must relate to each other in order to articulate the crises of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The concept of interpretation and the question of the philosophy-art relationship do not respond to any specific Kantian category. Nevertheless, we will see that the issues and problems generated by these two themes are symptomatic of many elements of Kant's philosophy that Adorno discusses. That is, the guiding thread of Adorno's discussion of interpretation, and the relation between art and philosophy, is determined in part by his reception of the Kantian tradition. In this chapter we will discuss why philosophy requires art, and art requires philosophy; why artworks' expression of historical experience is necessary for philosophy; and why philosophy's radical reflection is necessary for artworks. These questions may be explored through unpacking Adorno's category of interpretation.

Throughout *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno insists that philosophy and art require each other. Yet Adorno does not explain why philosophy and art are both necessary in aesthetic experience. For certain philosophers this balance would appear difficult to sustain: for some, the two poles of reason and sensuality automatically repel each other like opposing magnetic fields; for others, the two poles collapse into a single unity. Recall that, for Kant, philosophical reflection involves reason, while aesthetic experience involves judgment and feeling. Kant strenuously tries to deny the natural aspect of

[474] AT, p. 95.

subjectivity, and he excludes rational cognition from aesthetic judgment. Kant's refusal produced a fragmented subject that we are still trying to suture together today. Adorno acknowledges[475] that Kant's philosophy vacillates between a commitment to freedom and repressive instrumentality: on the one hand, the nonidentical is preserved because the Kantian subject "is not satisfied by reducing everything that exists to itself"; on the other hand, the Kantian subject is guilty of reducing particularity to universality, because all particulars must be reduced "to an analysis of the consciousness of the subject".[476] Adorno asserts: "…the belief that the object can be made to coincide entirely with the subject…is itself false".[477] Now, I will briefly discuss various German Idealist attempts to explain how philosophy and art relate to each other. Then I focus on Adorno's analysis of the contradiction.

Hegel acknowledges that aesthetic experience involves rational and sensuous elements; however, he attempts to reduce natural materiality to rational spirit through sublation.[478] The experience of beauty involves an "identity" of nature and spirit.[479] This is what Hegel means by reconciliation.[480] For Hegel, freedom involves reducing what is different (otherness) to identity, or mediating difference through spirit (so that the external becomes internal).[481] Beauty for Hegel is expressed when spirit and nature are reconciled or "*united*"--but this unity is caused by spirit itself.[482] For Hegel, thought and being are identical.[483] In the *Phenomenology*, the subject attains truth in the process of knowing itself—the process of each epistemic pattern's transcendence and resolution into

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[475] Adorno, *Kant's* Critique….
[476] Adorno, *Kant's* Critique…, p. 66.
[477] Adorno, *Kant's* Critique…, p. 218.

[478] Julia Peters, 'Beauty, Aesthetic Experience and Immanent Critique', *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain,* 59/60 (2009), pp. 67-81.
[479] Peters, 'Beauty, Aesthetic Experience…', pp. 68, 76.
[480] Peters, 'Beauty, Aesthetic Experience…', p. 76.
[481] Peters, 'Beauty, Aesthetic Experience…', p. 80.
[482] Peters, 'Beauty, Aesthetic Experience…', p. 70.

[483] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 116.

another pattern.[484] Yet Hegel never adequately explains, according to Andrew Bowie, how the subject may transition from infinity (spirit) to finitude (nature).[485] Hegel's method consists in overcoming oppositions or contradictions through a process of dissolution and unification.[486] For Hegel art must be subordinated to philosophy: "...it is only the overcoming of the sensuous that is its truth".[487]

John McCumber relates Hegel's aesthetics and Schiller's aesthetics to German Idealism as a whole.[488] He also provides a brief account of Romantic disenchantment with Kantian transcendental idealism.[489] For Schiller, the modern subject has "turned against" the sensuous world of nature, in order to dominate it and focus on speculative rationality.[490] Artworks, which are both rational and sensuous, may restore "self-unity without sacrificing modern morality" because the aesthetic unity is "a set of sensory materials intelligently arranged for a purpose".[491]

For McCumber, Hegel's aesthetics follows Schiller's aims quite closely: artworks may "achieve the 'reconciliation' of sense and intellect, by giving epiphantic sensory expression to a guiding conceptual truth".[492] For Hegel and Schiller, however, Adorno's thesis that true experience occurs when object and concept collide (or when the subject's categories are confronted with material particularity) is false, because "our concepts do not refer to objects," and so "the question of whether they accurately mirror the nature of things outside us recedes: a concept tends to be judged not by how it captures some nonconceptual reality, but in terms of how well it coheres with other concepts and with

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[484] Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*…, pp. 119, 121.

[485] Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*…, p. 122. See also Forster, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, p. 134. Forster confirms Hegel's "monistic vision of reality": the dialectical method "is supposed to capture the single underlying structure common to both our thought and the world of natural and spiritual phenomena that we think about".
[486] Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*…, p. 124.
[487] Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*…, p. 139.

[488] See John McCumber, 'Schiller, Hegel, and the Aesthetics of German Idealism', in Klaus Brinkmann (ed), *German Idealism: Critical Concepts in Philosophy, Volume IV* (4 vols, London and New York, 2007).
[489] McCumber, 'Schiller, Hegel…', p. 91.
[490] McCumber, 'Schiller, Hegel…', p. 91.
[491] McCumber, 'Schiller, Hegel…', p. 91.
[492] McCumber, 'Schiller, Hegel…', p. 93.

the laws of reason itself".[493] Thus, German Idealism argues that Kant's idea of the thing-in-itself must be mediated through the subject.[494] Finally, Julian Johnson notes that Hegel defines beauty as "'the semblance of the Ideal in sensuous form'" and names art "the reconciliation of spirit and materiality".[495]

Adorno is resistant to the synthetic solutions of Transcendental Idealism and German Idealism. Yet Adorno must answer several questions: What would art or philosophy possibly need from each other? What could philosophy possibly learn from art? How could art remain illusory after philosophy's rigorous interrogation? How might two opposing methods be reconciled, or even work together? As I have tried to argue, if philosophy is to avoid repressing materiality, it must reflect on historical experience, and must become aware of its own historical-social ground. Historical experience is expressed in modern artworks. Conversely, if artworks are to remain critical expressions of history, and revitalizing harbingers of possibility, then they require philosophical reflection in order to decipher their enigmatic appearance. Philosophical reflection analyzes the historical content of the work. As David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp argue, "...the individual work's 'truth' is generated, not by authorial intention alone, but by the artwork's own singular configuration of its materials; materials which have forms of historical 'experience' sedimented in them".[496]

Adorno's account in *Aesthetic Theory* lacks a description of how the subject might begin to relate differently towards objects. We might wonder: If Kant's and Hegel's solutions require transformation, how should the subject relate to objectivity? Is there a kind of agency within aesthetic experience that would enable the subject to re-orient towards the object? And, how may the aesthetic object reveal its own agency and experiences to the subject? Finally, how might the subject remain both passive (in order to experience materiality) and active (in order to critically reflect) in aesthetic experience? In the final aphorism in *Minima Moralia,* Adorno writes: "Perspectives must

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[493] McCumber, 'Schiller, Hegel…', p. 95.
[494] McCumber, 'Schiller, Hegel…', p. 95.

[495] Julian Johnson, 'Music In Hegel's Aesthetics: A Re-Evaluation', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 31 (April 1991). See also Roberts, 'Aura and Aesthetics…', pp. 154.

[496] Cunningham and Mapp, 'Introduction', pp. 3-4.

be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought."[497] As Gerhard Richter observes, "a relentless thinking through of thought's impossibility is the condition of possibility for striving toward what is possible".[498] For Richter, Adorno seeks to think through "...possible redemption, as the engine and arbiter of undeconstructible concepts such as freedom and justice, even if these have not been achieved and even if they remain the property of a negative otherness that is the homeland where no one has even been."[499] Certain basic moral concepts cannot be subjected to further analysis because they define the conditions of critical thought. Without them, criticism would degenerate into bare assertion and would lose its grounding in moral judgment.

Adorno places a nearly unbearable demand on thinking. He asserts that affective experience (that is, an aesthetic experience, rather than an ethical or cognitive experience) may alter the subject's rigid rational framework—even though it has hardened into bedrock. Yet how may thinking, which seems bound inextricably to the violence of identification, transcend its own limitations? Is it possible that "felt contact" with objects could reveal to the subject the damage that instrumental-utilitarian reason has inflicted upon objects?[500] Zuidervaart argues that subjects must imitate the artwork's objective contours rather than attempt to represent it using discursive reason: "only when recipients reproduce the artwork from within an experience immersed in the artwork will the artwork be understood (183-84/176-78). The proper path into an artwork is by way of imitation: qualified interpreters mime the work itself".[501] If Zuidervaart is correct, then presentation, rather than representation, allows the subject to cognize the work's negative truth—its nonidentity. In line with Zuidervaart, I will argue that one possibility may help at least to shift the subject's stance towards objectivity.

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[497] MM, p. 247.

[498] Richter, 'Aesthetic Theory…', p. 143.
[499] Richter, 'Aesthetic Theory…', p. 143.
[500] MM, p. 247.
[501] Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*…, p. 143.

I propose that the concept of philosophical reflection or interpretation may provide a way out of the aporia. Interpretation is not only a tool or method through which the subject may think abstractly about the artwork—which is how most commentators describe it. For example, Lydia Goehr argues that interpretation attempts to reveal truth content in the work.[502] The work's "pure sensuous form" can "show" or express truth content; only philosophy, however, can "say" or explain truth content in conceptual terms.[503] Goehr is correct, however, that interpretation allows the subject to "move closer" to the object by allowing the former to be affected concretely—that is, in terms of social-historical determination—by the latter.[504] The suffering of particular objects remains incomprehensible until the subject engages with particularity—through reflection upon the materiality within experience. For this reason, interpretation must be a form of *metaphysical experience* that appears through aesthetic experience. Metaphysical experience is composed of *historical-social* experience. Thus, philosophical reflection is intertwined with historical experience in aesthetic experience. I define metaphysical experience as reflection that is itself a form of experience. Such experience reveals the materiality of an object—that is, its natural and historical ground. Interpretation requires the subject's passive engagement with objectivity (so that the subject's drive to dominate and utilize objects for self-preservation momentarily ceases). Such passivity allows a different relationship to the past, in addition to objectivity: instead of automatically obeying past practices out of habit, the subject reflects upon the past's relation to the present; in this way, she gains distance from the past, without disavowing it entirely, and becomes open to a wholly different—and unknown—future. Interpretation becomes metaphysical through this critical transformation of tradition, which carves out a space for the new. The new is precisely that which promises to alter the subject's experience through "displac[ing] and estrange[ing] the world".[505] Martin explains: "For Adorno, the new is the promissory, even utopian impulse of something different erupting out of the present".[506] Martin's description is important because it defines the 'new' both as a

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[502] Lydia Goehr, *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays on the History of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 27.
[503] Goehr, *Elective Affinities*…, p. 27.
[504] Goehr, *Elective Affinities*…, p. 29.
[505] MM, p. 247.

subjective experience (a "utopian impulse" that transcends instrumental reason) and as an objective process ("something different" that breaks the reified space-time continuum constituted by natural history).[507] Martin also emphasizes the future-oriented directionality of the new.[508]

Adorno's Concept of Interpretation

Adorno maintains that art and philosophy are intertwined, and that each requires the other in modernity: "All aesthetic questions terminate in those of the truth content of artworks: Is the spirit that a work objectively bears in its specific form true?"[509] In other words, the subject who interrogates the artwork must employ philosophical reasoning as a method with which to explore it. Many commentators assume that the relation between art and philosophy is a purely epistemic one. Geuss, for instance, writes: "art needs philosophic interpretation as its necessary complement to develop its critical impetus into full-blown truth-telling...".[510] On this reading, art's deficiency lies in its inability to articulate its own experience; philosophy is necessary so that it may render the inexpressible concrete using language. The problem with this reading is that it contradicts Adorno's own principles regarding the difference between poetic and communicative language, and it reduces the artwork to an object without agency—rather ironically like Kant's epistemic distinction between subject and object.[511] This predominant reading rests on the assumption that philosophy's role is primarily to clarify what remains unknown. Yet this assumption has

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[506] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 198.
[507] Martin, 'Autonomy…', p. 198.
[508] For a brilliant analysis of the temporal processuality of Surrealism, and its emancipatory potential, see David Cunningham, 'A Question of Tomorrow: Blanchot, Surrealism and the Time of the Fragment', *Papers of Surrealism*, 1 (Winter 2003), pp. 1-17.
[509] AT, p. 426.
[510] Geuss, 'Art and Criticism…', p. 308.

[511] Bowie, 'Interpretation and Truth…', p. 44: "Like judgement, poetic language involves synthesis, but it is synthesis of a kind which does not reduce its object to already familiar terms, but seeks rather to arrive at something unique and individual".

its roots in the analytic tradition, and should not be uncritically accepted without awareness of its consequences. Much analytic philosophy accepts the false clarity or brightness of communicative language instead of interrogating the need to employ such language itself, which betrays a blind faith in rationality. On the contrary, philosophy does not only clarify or enlighten: it also deepens, darkens, obscures, and thickens the texture of objects, and of subjective experience. In short, philosophical reflection may extend that which we do not know—rather than curtail it. This dark aspect of cognition has been repressed within the philosophical tradition for a long time, but it is necessary if the subject is to avoid becoming over-exposed to anti-historical philosophical methods.

Thus the artwork does not require translation into concepts; rather, it requires an adequate, non-violent, reception at the hands of subjectivity. Bernstein affirms that philosophy cannot communicate that which artworks express (that is, truth-content, attained through expression and mimesis).[512] However, philosophy may provide the means to reflect upon artworks, which is the condition for works' disclosure of truth.[513] The practice of reflecting philosophically allows the subject to challenge reification, which closes down her capacity to experience. As we shall see, however, philosophical reflection, or the practice of interpretation, is more than a mere method for recovering truth: it constitutes metaphysical experience—the experience of otherness, as well as the hope of preserving it—as well. Such experience itself allows a form of knowledge that is non-discursive and materially grounded.

Bernstein argues that, since philosophy must operate using discursive concepts, it cannot escape violently distorting particularity.[514] This is true, although Adorno avers that there are different ways of using concepts. Artworks are artifacts that use non-conceptual "techniques" in order to become autonomous from empirical society.[515] Autonomous artworks use the method of determinate negation to critique society, but they cannot

[512] Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge…', p. 177.
[513] Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge…', p. 177.
[514] Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge…', p. 190.
[515] Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge…', p. 190.

speak their truth without philosophy.[516] Philosophy, instead of merely organizing and communicating aesthetic content, deepens it in an expressive way; thus, philosophy avoids structuring (and therefore falsifying) the artwork in accordance with the subject's ideological expectations. Philosophy, Bernstein notes, must be renounced as a discursive practice if it is to avoid "complicity with domination".[517] Philosophy escapes such complicity through interpreting artworks and through engaging with their aesthetic character. How do these practices uncover truth content? Nicholsen writes that the subject must both actively reflect (which involves association, fantasy, and speculation) and passively immerse herself in the object (which involves mimetic imagination) in order to attain aesthetic experience that grasps truth content.[518] This is a good account of the process of attaining truth content, because Nicholsen emphasizes the opposing poles of experience: both reason and imagination are required for aesthetic judgment.

In addition, Cunningham and Mapp allude to the fact that interpretation involves imitating the historical contours of the artwork, yet they do not develop or elaborate this thought: "Adorno thus makes the bold, and easily misunderstood, claim that works of literature and art stand constitutively in need of philosophical interpretation or criticism. This does not mean, however, that they are in simple need of paraphrase—of translation into concepts—but that only through interpretation of their 'immanent movement', and its historical logic, can their properly *critical* potential be unleashed (*NL2*: 97)".[519] More specifically: aesthetic truth must be conceived of as the expression of experience—specifically, historical and social experience. Experience reveals the past and indicates possibilities that lie in the future. This explains why truth content is bound together with spirit (the critical and intellectual power of the work, which allows the work to transcend

[516] Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge…', p. 190.
[517] Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge…', p. 190.
[518] Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1997), p. 20.
[519] Cunningham and Mapp, 'Introduction,' pp. 3-4.

given empirical conditions) and objectivity (the work's reference to material historical experience).[520]

In the same way, the spirit of an artwork is both utopian (oriented towards possibility) and material (oriented towards past and present experience). Thus the work's truth content is both negative or critical and speculative or transcendent. In order to unravel and reflect upon this truth, the artwork requires philosophy, because the experience contained within the work cannot express itself, and because philosophical reflection rescues aesthetic material from becoming entangled in tradition. Bernstein develops this claim; he maintains that philosophical reflection is also necessary for aesthetic experience because subjects may only realize how artworks critique and disrupt conventional rationality through reflection: "art's categorial self-consciousness, and its reflective displacement of enlightened categorial articulations, only register if they are discursively, philosophically, interpreted. Adorno...must attempt to generate a logic of parasitism, a logic of interaction between art and philosophy. And for him too art exceeds philosophical discursivity".[521] In the same way, philosophy only realizes that the artwork, and its own capacity to reflect, is historically situated through engaging with aesthetic expression, which is grounded in historical experience.

Arguably this is how we should understand Adorno's cryptic thesis that "The truth content of an artwork requires philosophy. It is only in this content that philosophy converges with art or extinguishes itself in it."[522] Since truth content contains historical

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[520] Alastair Morgan argues that materialist transcendence is composed of several aspects for Adorno. One aspect is intellectual experience, in which the subject attends to or mimetically follows the object in a kind of "contemplation without violence". Another aspect is the object's priority, indicated partially through the experience of truth content, or the "absolute" in objects, defined as "the expression of suffering contained within the domination of objects in a history of mere life as self-preservation, and the possibility of a different history, or of a life of objects freed from domination, from exchange, even from use". So, for Morgan, truth content points to the past and to the future. See Alastair Morgan, 'Mere Life, Damaged Life, and Ephemeral Life: Adorno and the Concept of Life', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 19 (March 2014), pp. 113-127, at p. 121, and MM, pp. 89-90.
[521] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*…, p. 243.
[522] AT, p. 433.

experience, which must be known if tradition is to be critically reflected upon, the artwork must somehow relate its experience to a subject. The only way that a subject may grasp an artwork's historical experience is through philosophical reflection. How does truth content allow philosophy and art to "converge[s] or become "extinguishe[d]"? Philosophy and art identify with each other (without actually becoming identical) when each engages with historical experience. More specifically, both art and philosophy become sites of historical experience, and thus allow the subject to become aware that its spirit is composed of nature. For this reason, the subject's aesthetic and philosophical experiences are to an extent passive, because they are dependent on materiality. Replying to Simon Jarvis, Bernstein writes: "...substance/otherness is preserved as the material inscription of semblant otherness, as art. Hence, the speculative proposition animating Adorno's project, his conception of subject and substance, is 'philosophy and art are one,' with the dialectic of substance becoming subject the matter of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*".[523] Bernstein grasps the dialectical interaction between art and philosophy; however, he suggests that Adorno's rationale for balancing art against philosophy (and philosophy against art) was purely philosophical (namely, that the two forces require each other so that they may remain in perpetual motion, in accordance with the Hegelian process of experience) rather than for material reasons (that is, reasons that emerge from our present historical crisis). I argue, modifying Bernstein's formulation, that art and philosophy should be joined because we must attend to historical experience using reason and imagination if subjectivity is not to negate its own material ground. Artworks express *and* reflect upon experience, and philosophy works to uncover its own historical experience, so that it may understand its reflection in a deeper way. This entails that philosophy's traditional function—to isolate itself from materiality and otherness—is exposed as harmful, and that art's apparent self-evidence (its value for itself) is unsettled, in the work's expression of history. Jarvis notes that "Adorno's thought comes to rest in the idea of restless testimony to its own conditionedness. Thought insists on its own conditionedness in order to bear witness to what it lives off; but whenever this insistence

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[523] J. M. Bernstein, 'Being Hegelian: Reply to Simon Jarvis,' in Gary K. Browning (ed), *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reappraisal* (Dordrecht and Boston, 1997), p. 76.

comes to rest it blocks comprehension of the conditions to which it would do justice".[524] The subject's conditions include social-historical materiality and natural materiality. In order to experience such materiality, however, history and nature must not be turned into categories that impose a narrative; rather, the true experience of suffering must be fought for. Knowledge of the subject's conditions, for Jarvis, is the same as the unsettling experience that reason is material rather than infinite.

> Art and philosophy, like body and mind, are traditionally foes:
> The dilemma of aesthetics appears immanently in the fact that it can be constituted neither from above nor from below, neither from concepts nor from aconceptual experience. The only possibility for aesthetics beyond this miserable alternative is the philosophical insight that fact and concept are not polar opposites but mediated reciprocally in one another.[525]

The argument, discussed earlier, that philosophy breaks the artwork's code, and unravels aesthetic illusion in order to attain essence, cannot be accurate, because it re-inscribes the conventional hierarchy between reason and sensibility that Adorno questions. A better explanation would be that art has access to truth that philosophy requires but cannot grasp on its own; and, that philosophy's rationality is conditioned and limited by its own historical experience—experience that is also expressed in artworks. When reason reflects upon its own conditions, it may break the natural desire for self-preservation that forces reason to commit authoritarian acts. Adorno's statement in the passage above that fact and concept are "mediated" in each other can only mean that materiality produces its own structure, through the expression of historical experience, and that rationality is grounded in material and finite conditions, which must be reflected upon if reason is to achieve a measure of self-knowledge.[526] Self-knowledge is crucial if reason is to avoid destruction. We will see that the Surrealists desired above all to know this material ground within rationality.

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[524] Simon Jarvis, 'The 'Unhappy Consciousness' and Conscious Unhappiness: On Adorno's Critique of Hegel and the idea of an Hegelian Critique of Adorno', in Gary K. Browning (ed), *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reappraisal* (Dordrecht and Boston, 1997), p. 68.
[525] AT, p. 435.
[526] AT, p. 435.

It is important not to interpret Adorno's concept of mediation in terms of epistemic principles alone; rather, the mediation between fact and concept (or art and philosophy) is a *historically necessary* act. It is necessary because, in modernity, reason must come to terms with nature if it is to escape authoritarianism, and art must express historical experience, which challenges convention (or second nature). Some commentators assume that Adorno is falling back upon one of Kant's first principles: that sensibility always requires understanding, and that understanding requires reason. This is not the case, for it is only in modernity that philosophy and art require each other. For instance, Bernstein argues that the Kantian divide between concept and intuition is replicated or redescribed in Adorno as the divide between construction and mimesis (in artworks' creation).[527] The sign (which signifies universality, identity-thinking, science) has come to dominate the image (particularity, aesthetic experience, material objects).[528] Bernstein continues that art needs philosophy because its "expressivity is discursively mute—it cannot articulate what its expression means".[529] Philosophy needs art because "it cannot express, that is, cannot give experiential meaning to the very thing on which it pivots".[530]

Some of Adorno's formulations suggest that philosophy interprets art in the same way that the concept determines intuition: "What is mediated in art, that through which the artwork becomes something other than its mere factuality, must be mediated a second time by reflection: through the medium of the concept".[531] Yet it is misleading to interpret the relationship between philosophy and art as epistemic. In fact, Adorno's principles are based upon historical and social experience—not a priori epistemic conditions. As Gene Ray observes, "It would be this myth of progress…that the Nazi genocide would seem to have killed off, along with the targeted victims...Adorno argues that at the end of the line in Auschwitz, history finally undid the claim of traditional metaphysics to be able to recuperate evil as a moment within the unfolding of a greater good".[532] Aesthetic

[527] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1072.
[528] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1072.
[529] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', pp. 1079-1080.
[530] Bernstein, 'Blind Intuitions…', p. 1079.
[531] AT, p. 453.
[532] Ray, 'Reading the Lisbon…', p. 11.

experience requires both an "element of receptivity" and "projection"—that is, both the "self-denial of the observer, his capacity to address and recognize what aesthetic objects themselves enunciate and what they conceal" and a certain "primacy of subjectivity" or reflective thought.[533] Art and philosophy share these attributes: art is receptive through its expression, which cannot always articulate itself, yet is able to spontaneously process material; philosophy is receptive because it requires experience in order to reflect, yet also spontaneous through its capacity to interpret. Adorno writes: "Understanding has as its idea that one become conscious of the artwork's content by way of the full experience [*Erfahrung*] of it".[534] Thus activity and passivity are interwoven in philosophy and art.[535]

Interpretation as Metaphysical Experience

Michael Rosen provides a clear and detailed account of the activities that interpretation achieves.[536] Although Rosen's account is admirably lucid, it assumes that interpretation is a wholly active or spontaneous activity practised by a subject upon an object. Thus it is in line with Kant's assumption that nature must be formed in order to become objective—and with Hegel's principle that nature provides the raw material for spiritual form, and that the subject invariably organizes the object.[537] For Rosen, Adorno's concept of interpretation spans a wide array of activities: it is cognitive and yet non-subsumptive; it secularizes objects; it discovers the 'more' in the object (qualitative particularity)—and thus indicates utopia; it uncovers the mediations of history; it reveals and releases objective content; it constructs models and constellations; and, finally, it criticizes and

[533] AT, pp. 438-439.
[534] AT, p. 439.
[535] See Figal, 'Natural Beauty…', p. 79: "interpretation itself must be thought as mimesis, as exemplifying the double structure of mimesis and rationality that prevails within the innermost character of the work of art. Interpretive mimesis is also a pre-rational relationship to the object, one that helps to resolve the enigma by tracing the immanent structures of the work of art to the point at which they break down...the mimetic principle of interpretation essentially denies the separation between the cognitive subject and the object of cognition. Through its interpretation art itself becomes cognition."
[536] Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge, 1982).

[537] Peters, 'Beauty, Aesthetic Experience…', pp. 70-73.

decomposes reified empirical society.[538] Rosen's account is nearly exhaustive, but he seems to forget Adorno's injunction to encounter the object, and his emphasis on the processual nature of experience. The object does not require the subject to draw out its potentiality: it has the power of expression. So why is interpretation necessary at all?

Interpretation is not only an active deciphering or decoding; rather, it is itself a mode of *receptivity*, which allows the subject to listen to the experience within the artwork. As such it should be considered metaphysical experience—that is, the experience of an object's materiality that expresses traces of history and nature—rather than a process of subjective or autonomous reasoning that confronts the work externally. Interpretation's receptivity demonstrates why philosophy requires art. Adorno repeatedly foregrounds the subject's imbrication with the object:

> Critique is not externally added into aesthetic experience but, rather, is immanent to it. The comprehension of an artwork as a complexion of truth brings the work into relation with its untruth, for there is no artwork that does not participate in the untruth external to it, that of its historical moment.[539]

The first line suggests that the artwork itself may criticize its own experience. This occurs when form acts on material. The artist does not decide herself how form should adapt to accommodate material; rather, the historical and social situation forces a certain change or development to occur. If the artist ignores the historical situation, the form and materials remain regressive, and the work reproduces ideology, or remains stuck in past conventions. It remains illusion—in the bad sense. This is why Adorno insists that "Not experience alone but only thought that is fully saturated with experience is equal to the phenomenon".[540] Artists must attend to historical experience if they want to construct the most advanced form, and to employ materials that have not become stale. Foster notes that, for Adorno, interpretation provides a way to unseal concepts in order to recover their material conditions of possibility:

> ...dialectical interpretation dissolves the concept into historical experience, bringing to awareness the dependence of the concept on what cannot be

[538] Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic*…, pp. 166-168.
[539] AT, p. 440.
[540] AT, p. 443.

> assimilated within its categories as a conceptual concept...the nonconceptual [is attained] in the unfolding of the social, historical, and human significance of an experiential item...the object is to be understood as a site that accumulates meanings in its movement through historical time.[541]

Adorno also provides a nuanced description of the relationship between art and philosophy. Artworks require philosophy so that their expression is not uncritically reproduced as ideology; at the same time, philosophy requires art, because without the knowledge of its own historical experience, philosophy becomes abstract and reified, and cannot accomplish its aim, which is to critique society.

> Lived experiences are indispensible, but they are no final court of aesthetic knowledge. Precisely those elements of art that cannot be taken immediately in possession and are not reducible to the subject require consciousness and therefore philosophy. […] Art awaits its own explanation. It is achieved methodically through the confrontation of historical categories and elements of aesthetic theory with artistic experience, which correct one another reciprocally.[542]

Philosophy's categories are challenged by artworks' material experience, which is in turn challenged and interpreted by critical thought. The process is reciprocal because neither philosophy nor art holds the upper hand. Chua notes that composition and reflection are both forms of experience: "This means that the musical score is no different from the philosophical text: they both demand analysis".[543] He continues: "If music is philosophy, then it must exist, for Adorno, as an *objective* truth and not a subjective state.... Analysis must lead to critical interpretation; truth must be teased out of technique."[544] Thinking must be redefined as a receptive experience, and experience must be redefined as a process of comprehension that does not achieve epistemic closure. How could philosophy give up its stake in determination? And how could art give up its principle that expression

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[541] Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery*…, p. 22.
[542] AT, p. 447.
[543] Daniel K. L. Chua, 'Review: Believing in Beethoven', *Music Analysis*, 19 (October, 2000), pp. 410.
[544] Chua, 'Review…', p. 410.

and comprehension are separate processes? The best way is to consider interpretation as a mode of metaphysical experience. Adorno alludes to the fact that philosophical comprehension must confront aesthetic objectivity—objectivity that does not merely disappear when philosophy interprets it: "The task of a philosophy of art is not so much to explain away the incomprehensibility, which speculative philosophy has invariably sought to do, but rather to understand the incomprehensibility itself".[545] If the phrase 'understand the incomprehensibility itself' is not to remain a mere paradox, we must redefine what philosophy and art signify, and avoid their conventional definitions. The subject only understands the incomprehensibility of the object when philosophy realizes its own finitude (reason's historical conditions), and art realizes the depth of its own knowledge (historical experience).

Philosophy, Art, and Metaphysical Experience

In Adorno's final lectures on 'Metaphysics,' he discusses how the concepts of metaphysical experience and metaphysical thought have changed in modernity.[546]

Metaphysical experience involves objectivity; it does not result from reason's power to abstract from material reality and ascend to a realm of pure ideas.[547] For Adorno, the subject's confrontation with otherness—which, in modernity, is nothing other than the forgotten suffering of history—forms the starting point of metaphysical experience. It is necessary to confront otherness if reason (history) is to acknowledge its own role in suppressing and damaging its material conditions (nature). This confrontation is especially urgent today because, after Auschwitz, "the assertion of a purpose or meaning that is formally embedded in metaphysics is transformed into ideology, that is to say, into an empty solace that at the same time fulfills a very precise function in the world as it is: that of keeping people in line".[548]

[545] AT, p. 440.
[546] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 427-469.
[547] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 441, 449, 466.
[548] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 428.

We may conclude that metaphysical experience is composed of historical experience.[549] In opposition to modern philosophy (as practiced, for instance, by Bacon and Descartes), Adorno argues that tradition and history are conditions of cognition: "…the traditional, that is, the historical moment, not only permeates supposedly authenticated knowledge…but actually makes that knowledge possible."[550] Thus we should not revive allegedly pure categories, such as freedom, beauty, the good, death, or fate, without radically interrogating how those categories have been appropriated and transformed in modernity. For instance, Adorno discusses how the experience of dying has been altered by society and recent history.[551] He observes: "But the less people really live…the more they become aware that they have not really lived—the more abrupt and frightening death becomes for them, and the more it appears as a misfortune. It is as if, in death, they experienced their own reification: that they were corpses from the first. […] The terror of death today is largely the terror of seeing how much the living resemble it."[552] Metaphysical experience must be grounded in historical and social experience, because traditional philosophical disciplines or fields—such as ontology, epistemology, morality, and aesthetics—have all been affected by the destruction of cultural tradition caused by twentieth-century events.

Metaphysical experience for Adorno, however, must not assume that mere existence (the nature of things) has a positive meaning or purpose. On the contrary, metaphysical experience presents the experience of emptiness or nothingness (for instance, in Beckett's work).[553] For Adorno, the subject may no longer assume that the nature of existence—the traditional object of the metaphysician's inquiry—has a positive or "affirmative character".[554] This is because historical experience has migrated into metaphysical experience and altered its very essence.[555] Adorno remarks: "In the face of the experiences we have had, not only through Auschwitz but through the introduction of torture as a permanent institution and through the atomic bomb…in the face of these

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[549] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 428, 435, 459-460.
[550] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 463.
[551] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 459-460.
[552] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 460.
[553] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 428, 438, 468-469.
[554] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 428.
[555] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 428.

experiences the assertion that what is has meaning…becomes a mockery; and in the face of the victims it becomes downright immoral."[556]

Philosophy seeks to understand that which is—not merely to repeat it.[557] Understanding, however, cannot remain distant from its object, as mimesis demonstrates. Adorno observes that "…the joy of thought…is simply the joy of elevation, the joy of rising beyond what merely is. […] If the pedestrian replacement of knowledge by the mere registering, ordering, and summarizing of facts were to have the last word against the elevation of thought, truth itself would really be a chimera...[no more than the] arranging of the merely existent."[558] Thus metaphysical experience must transcend the sphere of immanence (empirical reality).[559] For this reason, metaphysical experience must be conceived as a kind of philosophical thought that uncovers, and interprets, objectivity. At the same time, philosophical thought must immerse itself in the immanent context that imprisons it before it can contemplate rising above that context. Thus Adorno's utopian hope that philosophy might transcend the false world is always tempered by the knowledge that one can never entirely escape ideology.

Finally, the possibility of metaphysical experience constitutes a promise that is broken.[560] This is why Adorno describes such experience as radically fallible and as open to failure.[561] He states: "…only what can be refuted, what can be disappointed, what can be wrong, has the openness I have spoken of; that is, it is the only thing that matters. It is in this concept of openness, as that which is not already subsumed under the identity of the concept, that the possibility of disappointment lies".[562] Adorno recalls that, in his own childhood, he experienced the names of distant, unknown villages as promising enchantment and magic, in a manner that Proust vividly presents.[563] However, the imagined promise of fulfillment conjured by the names is always disappointed by the

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[556] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 428.
[557] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 438-439.
[558] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 438-439.
[559] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 438-439.
[560] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 466-467.
[561] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 466-467.
[562] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 465.
[563] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 464.

empirical reality of the towns themselves.[564] Thus, to sum up, metaphysical experience involves both the presentation of suffering (immanent historical reality) and the presentation of the impulse to transcend that suffering (the utopian impulse towards difference and otherness).[565]

Subjects may become aware of ideology and metaphysical experience through reflecting on history. Ray writes: "Adorno...carries out...that 'determinate negation' that confronts the traditional category of the sublime with the material disaster of contemporary history...The legacy of Auschwitz is that there is no safe place from which to observe and reflect on this event".[566] In other words, reflection cannot distance itself from its object; the subject remains caught up in the forces of history. In order to break the hold of the past on the present, it is necessary to understand the mechanisms that allow tradition to repeat itself. Artworks force the subject to confront some of their goals, beliefs, and values that have not been properly reflected upon, and which may harden into an inflexible ideological structure if they remain unconscious. Since metaphysical experience calls upon the subject to interpret objectivity, aesthetic experience must involve knowledge: "Because the element of truth is essential to artworks, they participate in knowledge, and this defines the only legitimate relation to them."[567] The knowledge that arises from artworks however is elusive: it cannot be simply conceptualized or determined, because it involves truth content, which involves utopian possibility as well as the expression of historical suffering; and it expresses historical experience, which is known somatically as well as intellectually.

Bubner argues that philosophy performs the work of dialectical negation that constitutes art's resistance to empirical reality, and also its presentation of truth: "Philosophy itself introduces something that is not actually contained in the innocent works of art themselves, and could never be contained there: namely the *negation of existing reality*".[568] However, the artwork's formal re-organization of traditional material also results from determinate negation, because it results in the transformation of

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[564] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* p. 464.
[565] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?...,* pp. 435-438.
[566] Ray, 'Reading the Lisbon…', p. 12.
[567] AT, p. 440.
[568] Bubner, 'Can Theory Become Aesthetic?...', p. 26.

empirical material into aesthetic form. Such form displays non-violent synthesis, which is precisely what reality might look like were a state of reconciliation to be achieved. Thus Bubner unfairly treats the artwork as a mere object that must be subjected to the dialectical work of rationality. He subscribes uncritically to a Kantian division between passive matter and active reason.

Adorno writes: "History is inherent to aesthetic theory. Its categories are radically historical…".[569] In modernity, for example, the concept of taste is no longer acceptable as an aesthetic category: "Experience alone is in no position to legislate aesthetically because a boundary is prescribed to it by the philosophy of history. If experience crosses this limit it degenerates into emphatic appreciation".[570] The judgment of taste remains a subjective experience that cannot attend to the historical or social content of the aesthetic object, and the concept of taste has no critical or intellectual content—it is purely pleasurable and therefore easily exploited by society. Hence it must be discarded, for in an era of authoritarian propaganda, and capitalist illusion, the subject must have a method with which she can critically reflect upon the historical-social material that she is given. Historical experience determines which categories contain truth content and which fall into ideology. Adorno does not spell out that in order for the subject to determine the relevance of her experience, she must passively receive such experience as well as reflect upon it. The subject must become passive (so that she does not determine the artwork) and active (so that she reflects philosophically upon the work) at the same time. Hence interpretation must fulfill two functions at once: it must be critical while listening to ideological claims; it must philosophically reflect upon objectivity while remaining open to historical untruth.

Interpretation cannot be simply another method of fixing the artwork's fluidity. If the subject attempts to categorize the work without listening to the experience within it, the experience decays into an exercise in conceptualization. The subject in that case fails to gain mimetic proximity to the work; as a result, she cannot reflect adequately on its historical inheritance. Adorno writes, "Highly mediated in itself, art stands in need of

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[569] AT, p. 454.

[570] AT, p. 442. See David Kaufman, 'Matters of Taste', *Monatshefte for deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur*, 94 (Spring, 2002), pp. 67-79.

thinking mediation…".[571] However, in order to reflect on the work—and not merely abstractly determine it—the subject must be receptive to the work's inner composition. For this to occur, interpretation must be a species of metaphysical experience; this defines the subject's relationship to the work, which remains immanent and transcendent to aesthetic truth: "To whoever remains strictly internal [to the artwork], art will not open its eyes, and whoever remains strictly external distorts artworks by a lack of affinity."[572] The subject should ideally become open enough that her determinative ego loses its rigidity and becomes able to adapt to the experiences within the work itself. Such openness requires a kind of strength that is not defined within the traditional Kantian framework.

Now, let us examine why interpretation is valuable and necessary in aesthetic experience. First, Adorno's concept of aesthetic interpretation, or philosophical reflection, involves thinking or cognitive activity, and so is not merely a species of phenomenological perception or immediate intuition. Because it involves cognition, interpretation may critique ideology, and avoids the naivety and superficiality of perception. Perception is inadequate because it is unable to uncover the different layers of historical truth and social ideology that compose an artwork. Interpretation thus overcomes some of the problems that adhere to Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment: judgment analyzes the formal properties of artworks, but remains subjectively oriented, because it can only employ a priori categories; judgment tries to bridge the gap between freedom and nature (or, in Adorno's language, enlightenment and myth), but fails to do so because it reinforces the dualism between universal and particular, as it ascends from experience to indeterminate concepts; judgment remains unable to uncover the historical experience sedimented in artworks, for it has no language for the difference between false and true experience, as it appears in the content of a work; finally, aesthetic judgment cannot know an artwork's historical experience, because it is committed to an ideal of disinterested contemplation that is ahistorical and transcendent.

Second, although interpretation is a cognitive activity, it does not marginalize other kinds of human experience such as imagination, bodily experience, or emotional experience. Thus interpretation does not seek to use other kinds of experience

[571] AT, p. 446.
[572] AT, p. 443.

instrumentally. Even in reflective judgment, imagination's possibility for exploring otherness is not realized, because it must cooperate with understanding, rather than respond independently to objectivity. Imagination may explore the various layers of objectivity without imposing subjective categories upon them. Thus, interpretation is philosophical and yet has roots in experience.

Third, interpretation is necessary because the structure of modern art requires a new kind of aesthetic method. Modern artworks do not allow truth to be grasped through reflective judgment; in modernity, the subject must confront her own inability to ascend from particularity towards universality. Modern art's truth content is always indirectly expressed—that is, the content appears obscure because it is new and brushes experience against the grain. Instead of conceiving of the work in terms of essence and appearance, it would be better to grasp it as surface and depth, which remain continuous with each other (not separate ontological substances) and yet are only grasped with difficulty.

Fourth, Adorno famously argues that art's value and right to exist is no longer self evident in modernity.[573] This is because historical events have shaken the ground of tradition; philosophical values that were taken for granted—such as the faith in rationality, the apparently immutable moral law, humanity's interminable progress toward emancipation, the divinity of human being, and subjectivity's distance from objectivity—are now in doubt. It is noteworthy that many of the values that appear empty in the light of history could be reformulated as Kantian ideas of reason, which appear in works of art as aesthetic ideas. For Adorno, artworks justify their legitimacy through provoking society to critically and philosophically reflect. This practice is aesthetic interpretation. Hence interpretation is necessary partially because of art's precarious and uncertain position in relation to society and history.

In modernity, any aesthetic form has no guarantee of security or legitimacy. Because the traditional aesthetic forms and categories cannot be relied upon to produce truth, or to resist the social totality, the subject must try to reflect upon the relationship between the artwork's form (which may either illuminate, transfigure, or obscure material) and its content (that material which tries to speak through the work, and which only appears as truth when the traditional categories are invested with new energy). This

[573] AT, p. 1.

is the reason why modern works constantly unsettle the conviction that aesthetic form may communicate ideas; and also why the subject must excavate the work in order to attain an experience of truth (that is, an experience of nonidentity, which does not allow successful knowledge, but rather shows the failure of reason).

Fifth, any truth or knowledge gained through artworks is an achievement—that is, it is won through difficult intellectual and experiential labour. Such labour is necessary because an aspect of the modern artwork is autonomous from society. Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that bodily perception is sufficient to grasp an object's essence. Critical Theory would respond, though, that an object's truth is always changing with history, and so only reflective engagement with society may grant provisional (transient) insight into objectivity. In addition, subjects' autonomy has been damaged; we have become nearly assimilated within society. The difficulty of achieving a critical perspective is evidence of this. In order to cognize art's truth, subjects must try to resist their own integration, or reflect upon their lack of freedom. The subject cannot constitute the work in the same way that she is able to determine empirical objects. Hence, reflective engagement is necessary.

Sixth, interpretation is not only subjective; if it is to succeed (which means that the subject *fails* to grasp the work fully, and realizes her own rational impotence and subjective frailty) it requires that the artwork present itself in a certain way to the observer, reader, or listener.[574] Thus there is an objective aspect to experience that is not present in Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment. Specifically, although the work's truth is inseparable from its historical-social context, that context must appear through semblance. Thus, the knowledge of history is mediated by possibility. The new appears when the artwork critically expresses the past while opening future possibilities. The new forecloses any attempt to coercively determine objectivity. In order to comprehend these various strands of the artwork, the subject must employ interpretation. Determinative judgment is too reductive; moral judgment misses the autonomy of aesthetic experience; philosophical reflection alone remains isolated from sensuousness and the experience of

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[574] Morgan, 'Mere Life, Damaged Life…', p. 124, and Alastair Morgan, *Adorno's Concept of Life* (New York and London, 2007).

history and society; and Kantian aesthetic judgment is disconnected from actual empirical objectivity.

Seventh, Kant claims that aesthetic judgment is isolated from sensibility, cognition, and morality. Aesthetic judgment's isolation grounds its autonomy, and its disinterestedness. Thus although aesthetic judgment is mediated (that is, it is a process that involves free play, and which results in the feeling of pleasure, and so is not merely intuitive), it is not interpretive. Yet it is unclear what aesthetic experience consists in if it purifies experience of sensation, desire, philosophical reflection, and moral judgment, because an experience that subtracted those elements would be empty and formal, and meaningless in terms of human agency and metaphysical import. Kant might reply: Who said that art has anything to do with metaphysics or agency? It is merely a play of forms in judgment. However, in modernity, such a position is difficult to uphold, because the autonomy of the artwork depends upon resisting the conformity imposed by society and history. History is no longer external to artistic form and content; instead, it is inseparable from aesthetic experience. We have seen this in our discussion of Dada; the next chapter will examine the material content of Surrealism. Such inseparability entails that the subject must disentangle truth from falsity in order to avoid the ideological repetition of conformist patterns. The subject may only disentangle aesthetic experience through interpretation.

Chapter Five: Adorno's Concept of Technique and Max Ernst's *Natural History* Series

> To me, the great products of the new art almost always seem to have been those which still had tradition as an essential force within them and then negated it on their own strength. The great revolutionary artists of the period—such as Picasso, such as Braque, such as Schoenberg and so forth—were all within tradition, and, by locking horns with it, they essentially brought about something like an induction of tension. […] Where tradition no longer exists as an object, however sublimated, the power of true revolutionary art does not really exist.[575]

Now, theory must prove that it is grounded in materiality. In this chapter I'd like to interpret several Surrealist artworks, and Surrealism as a revolutionary movement, in order to argue that Adorno's concept of technique should be revised. The practice of interpreting artworks must be demonstrated rather than theorized in order to test theory's relevance, and its aptitude to its object. That is, the object itself lays out the ground rules for theory's principles and methods. In the same way, philosophy requires materiality, and thus aesthetic experience; and art's agency becomes radical and critical through philosophical interpretation. Although some of Surrealism's most powerful artworks were produced before the Second World War, the conditions for the historical catastrophe that culminated in the concentration camps were present, and festering, years before 1945. Thus my analysis of Surrealism is continuous with the thesis that the Holocaust, as the historical experience of mass death and suffering, forces us to revise our philosophical and aesthetic methods that were assumed to have a priori validity.

Adorno's concept of technique manifests contradiction: its method conflicts with its aim. This contradiction demonstrates that society is itself irrational. On the one hand, technique participates in violence (the domination of nature) perpetrated by reason. On the other hand, technique, insofar as it presents a new way of forming material artistically, must negatively refer to utopian impulses, and must express nature's suffering. In this way technique indirectly expresses truth content: the possibility that arises from actuality (or, unconscious nature that emerges from convention, or second

[575] Adorno, *Aesthetics*…, pp. 152-153.

nature). How is technique able to attain, even negatively, its other? How can reason communicate with unreason? Technique must be constructed using irrational impulses as well as rational reflection. In this chapter, I argue for a conception of technique that differs from Adorno's own definition. The advantage of this conception of technique is that it displays clearly the contradictory nature of the process of artistic production, which involves both conscious and unconscious elements; further, it points to a concrete illustration of Adorno's concept of reconciliation, which does not signify simply Idealist identification, or that organic wholeness that phenomenology adores, but rather suggests that different elements may non-harmoniously co-exist with each other.

We may prove the advantage of this new concept of technique by examining the Surrealists' excavation of the unconscious. The Surrealists attempted to free the mind using a method that was both rational and irrational: automatic writing.[576] Max Ernst's techniques of frottage and grattage, while distinct from automatic writing, are still irrational means for unlocking the hidden expressive possibilities of subjectivity. Ernst's 'Natural History' series ought to be interpreted as a meditation on the dialectic between freedom and materiality. Thus I argue that Adorno's concept of technique as a wholly rational procedure ought to be revised and amended in order to accommodate the discoveries of Surrealism in general, and Ernst in particular.[577] Technique should be conceptualized as encompassing imaginative processes that seek to uncover and invent reality anew—something that rationality on its own cannot accomplish. This section is divided into several parts. First, I discuss Surrealism in general, and Ernst's works in particular; second, I analyze Adorno's concept of technique; finally, I propose a nonviolent synthesis of Critical Theory and Surrealism.[578]

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[576] According to Giuseppe Gatt, 'automatism' for Andre Breton seeks "through communication, whether spoken or written, […] to transmit the real functioning of mental processes, no longer conditioned by the usual and artificial limits imposed by the will and conscience, but instead free to reveal its spontaneous form and action." Giuseppe Gatt, *Twentieth-Century Masters: Max Ernst* (London and New York, 1970), p. 9.
[577] Ernst requires reflection or "critical consciousness" to construct the work of art after the imagination has liberated and excavated the unconscious. In this he amends or alters Breton's conception of automatic writing. Gatt, *Twentieth-Century…*, pp. 21-22.
[578] Theodor W. Adorno and Elizabeth Lenk, *The Challenge of Surrealism: The Correspondence of Thedor W. Adorno and Elizabeth Lenk*, Susan H. Gillespie (ed), (Minneapolis, 2015). Lenk was one of Adorno's doctoral students in the 1960s. She also

Surrealism, Ernst, and Technical Magic

The technique of automatic writing emerged from the objective historical conditions that affected the fears, desires, and goals of the Dadaists and Surrealists.[579] Although Max Ernst was born in Germany, he experienced the intellectual milieu of Paris after the First World War. As Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski explain, "…[S]urrealism was born in the social, cultural and intellectual ferment that followed the First World War. […] Paris perceived itself as…the capital of French rationalism and the Enlightenment ideal…. With the ending of the war in 1918, such a view was, if not in tatters, at least tarnished. The war exposed the raw nerves of civilization itself…".[580] The First World War introduced human beings to trench warfare, nerve gas, machine guns, mass slaughter, and other modern horrors.[581] Richardson and Fijalkowski continue: "the young people who were drawn to [S]urrealism at this time felt they had nothing to lose: the society in which they lived had nothing to offer them that could assuage their sense of rage, and we should not be surprised that one of their first organized activities was an enquiry into the possibility of suicide."[582]

Automatism is a means for freeing the mind from the constraints of rationality: specifically, the natural desires of the ego to preserve its own activity regardless of the

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proposes that Surrealist praxis and Critical Theory may work together—thus resisting and augmenting her advisor's arguments. Her correspondence with Adorno provides a glimpse into the latter's working life, Lenk's research on Surrealism, and the political events of May 1968 in Paris.

[579] Cathrin Klingsohr-Leroy, *Surrealism*, Uta Grosenick (ed), (Koln, 2015), p. 8: "The artists who came together in Paris in the early 1920s shared a deep distrust of materialistic, bourgeois society, which, they believed, was responsible for the First World War and its terrible aftermath. Not only that, but with its smug, superficial way of life and its belief in the omnipotence of technological and scientific achievement, society had succumbed to a process of degeneration to which the only answer was a revolutionary new anti-art. […] Surrealism would not only embrace art and literature but would also play a part, as the first Manifesto put it, in 'solving all the principal problems of life'. It would affect every aspect of experience and bring about social and psychological change."

[580] Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (eds. and trans), *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations* (London and Sterling: 2001), p. 2.

[581] Richardson and Fijalkowski, *Surrealism Against*…., p. 3.

[582] Richardson and Fijalkowski, *Surrealism Against*…., p. 3.

cost to objectivity.[583] Automatism also attempts to present objectivity—or, according to Breton, the unconscious—without the distorting and harmful mediation of rationality.[584] The Dadaists (and, later, the Surrealists) were working against the spirit of the times, which sought to repress the suffering and destruction caused by the war, to regenerate bourgeois culture, and to force individuals to conform to conservative social values (such as religious devotion, patriotic sacrifice, love of family, and the entrepreneurial individual). Ernst, among many other avant-garde artists, recognized that the system could only be criticized by reflecting on the historical situation; through such reflection, the artist would produce an artistic method capable of presenting the current crisis, and thus also of recalling the past, which lay in ruins. It would not do to continue to use outworn or broken tools. The past could only be reflected upon indirectly, through a new and fragmentary optic. For Ernst, that optic came in several forms: frottage, grattage, and decalcomania.

Surrealism ought to be considered a method for resisting reification—whether cultural, psychological, or social. According to the second and third principles of the 'Declaration of January 27, 1925',

> 2. SURREALISM is not a new or easier means of expression, nor even a metaphysics of poetry;
>
> It is a total means of complete liberation of the mind
>
> *and all that resembles it*.

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[583] "All of them [Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse] showed how reason was in collusion with power, as philosophy and science were with politics, and they all denounced the most formidable ideology, that of the supposed anti-ideological weapon which is reason itself. The realization of the rational is nothing other than that of world bureaucracy…. And it is the instrumental functional rationality of means alone which ineluctably leads us to this end…". Bernard Caburet, 'You Will Always Cherish Your Failures, Machine-Man', in Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson, and Krzystof Fijalkowski (eds.), *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas* (London, 2015), pp. 89-90.

[584] "Automatic writing consisted of writing down as rapidly as possible, without revision or control by reason, everything that passed through the mind when the writer had been able to detach himself sufficiently from the world outside. This exercise was intended to lay bare the 'mental matter' which is common to all men, and to separate it from thought, which is only one of its manifestations". Sarane Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art* (London, 2012), p. 47.

3. We are determined to make a Revolution.[585]

The fact that Surrealism is known primarily as an artistic style demonstrates how the possibilities of radical politics and philosophical thought have, in the twentieth century, been urgently expelled from the domain of art.[586] The Surrealists wanted to destroy static functionality and considered automatic writing a revolutionary technique that would advance that aim. Maurice Blanchot writes: "With automatic writing, it is my freedom that triumphs.... The result is that these free words become centres of magical activity and, more than that, things as impenetrable and opaque as any human object withdrawn from utilitarian signification".[587] Automatic writing tries to allow the matter itself to speak, and to bypass the rational ego. The imagination is often defined as a merely passive vehicle for materiality. For instance, Breton declares:

> But we, who have made no effort whatsoever to filter, who in our works have made ourselves into simple receptacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments* who are not mesmerized by the drawing we are making, perhaps we serve an even nobler cause. Thus do we render with integrity the 'talent' which has been lent to us. You might as well speak of the talent of this platinum ruler, this mirror, this door, and of the sky, if you like.[588]

Arguably, however, the imagination must also remain critical and reflective if it is to avoid falling into false (merely conventional) patterns of thought. Such reflexivity is deepened when the imagination imitates, rather than conceptually determines, an object.[589] Thus the "freedom" Blanchot describes is not the Kantian freedom of pure subjectivity—it is closer to the potentiality expressed in objectivity.[590]

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[585] Louis Aragon, Antonin Artaud, et al., 'Declaration of January 27, 1925', in Richardson and Fijalkowski, *Surrealism Against…*, p. 24. Signed by many prominent Surrealists in the early Paris group, including Ernst.

[586] See Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous…*, 'Introduction'. As mentioned previously, Bernstein names this modern process the alienation of art from truth and morality.

[587] Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 217. This passage is from Maurice Blanchot's essay 'Reflections on Surrealism' (1949) in his book *The Work of Fire*.

[588] Quoted in Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics* (Oxford, 2004), p. 28. From Breton, *Manifestoes…*, pp. 27-28.

[589] Gatt writes that Ernst's orientation is divided between critique and dream: "Thus we find side by side an imagination that is drawn towards a dream world, towards the most

Although many of Ernst's artworks might appear to be wholly isolated from political intention, their meticulous attention to the historical state of the artistic material, as well as the specific technique of articulation used, betrays an acute social awareness. As Werner Spies observes: "The contrast between utmost freedom in the act of creativity and utmost determinateness in the completed work plays a large part in Ernst's art."[591] We can observe this for ourselves in Ernst's work entitled "*La Roue de la lumiere*" (The Wheel of Light) (Figure 3).[592]

The picture is of an eye, opened wide, exquisitely textured and detailed. The eyelashes look dangerous: like the tendrils of a plant, or the spines of a fish that lives far beneath the ocean surface. The white part of the eye appears fractured, like fissured riverbed or broken rock; the coloured part looks as if it is rotating like a 'wheel', and the lines are perfectly, artificially, straight. The surrounding surface, which would be skin if it were part of a human face, is rough and flecked with shadow. Ernst has also divided up the background behind the eye into darkness and light—or earth and sky, perhaps to give the illusion of depth, or to confuse the viewer's sense of proportion. The flesh at the front of the eye is egg shaped. The picture would impart the illusion of a human eye, except for the fact that the subject is set against what appears to be a torn sheet of paper or fragment of material, as if the artist was about to throw it away. Finally, the delicately shaded textures of the composition add to the strange atmosphere that pervades the picture. The object, or objects, that Ernst used to give the textures have disappeared and become invisible—although we can imaginatively associate the different textures with many different objects, such as snakeskin (dark ground), gently rolling waves ('skin' beneath

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deranged states of mind, and a critical conscience that sees the need to control and comprehend the meaning of every step in this disturbing experience." He continues: "So the painting is not a passive record of an event or a movement in the psyche, but a means to an end, an instrument of research in the quest for an understanding of the world." Gatt, *Twentieth-Century…*, pp. 9, 12.

[590] Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 217.

[591] Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Frottages*, translated by Joseph M. Bernstein (London, 1969), v.

[592] Max Ernst, "*La Roue de la lumiere*" (The Wheel of Light), 1925, *Frottage*, pencil on paper, 25 x 42 cm [10 x 16.5 in]. Private Collection. *Histoire naturelle*, sheet 29. In Mary Ann Caws (ed), *Surrealism: Themes and Movements* (London, 2004), p. 64.

the eye), or a swirling whirlpool or abyss, or a setting sun (iris).[593] The title also anticipates the mysterious and threatening sun-like forms that appear in Ernst's later works, such as *La Foret* (The Forest), *La roué du soleil* (The Sun Wheel) or *Foret-aretes* (Fishbone Forest), all produced in the late 1920s.[594]

Mary Ann Caws comments that Ernst's picture was part of a series entitled *Histoire naturelle* (Natural History), "which was exhibited and published, with a preface by Jean Arp, in 1926".[595] Ernst used the frottage technique in 1920-21, but gave it up, and then rediscovered it in 1925.[596] Briefly, frottage involves placing a sheet of paper, or canvas, on top of an object (such as a wood floor, a stone, a candlestick, or wallpaper) and then rubbing through the paper or canvas using a pencil, crayon, or charcoal. The resulting image will impart the texture and tactile contours of the hidden object while masking the complete details of its surface, as it appears visually. Caws continues: "In his text 'Comment on force l'inspiration', ('How one can force inspiration,' *Le Surrealisme au service de la revolution*, 6, 1933) Ernst described the *frottage* technique as a mechanism to intensify the 'mind's powers of irritability'".[597] Irritability signals a reaction to external stimuli, or forces that cannot be controlled. Ernst considers that the technique may be used to harness the subject's unconscious as well as the potentiality present in everyday objects that has been stifled due to the dominance of utility.[598]

Elizabeth Legge argues that Ernst synthesized, and transformed, various traditions from German and French history and art in his work (in addition to Freudian psychoanalysis): Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopedie*; the tradition of constructing and painting Cabinets of Curiosities from the seventeenth century; Enlightenment science and mysticism; Romantic poets' scientific interests (specifically Goethe and Novalis);

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[593] As Spies remarks, "…frottage was more than a technique…Frottage is bound up with a new objectivity. It creates this objectivity in that the structure Ernst rubs through is subordinate to a pictorial object that has nothing to do with that structure. Two planes of reality coincide." Spies, *Max Ernst Frottages*, vi.
[594] Ulrich Bischoff, *Max Ernst (1891-1976): Beyond Painting*, translated by Judith Harrison (Koln and Bonn, 1991), pp. 40-41; Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 65. .
[595] Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 64.
[596] Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 64.
[597] Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 64.
[598] Spies comments that "[e]ven in frottage the impulse of the Dadaist is still discernable. He proceeds from a nonartistic reality". Spies, *Max Ernst…*, viii.

and previous artists (such as Renard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Apollinaire, and Dufy).[599] Legge intriguingly notes that Ernst's plate "The Wheel of Light" refers to the female principle of imagination within God, as theorized by Jacob Bohme, as well as the seductive eyes of Gala Eluard, with whom Ernst had been romantically obsessed.[600]

> Here is Ernst's own account of the origins of frottage:
> It all began with a memory from my childhood, when my bed used to stand opposite panels of imitation mahogany. When I was half-asleep, these panels would act as a kind of optical 'provocateur' and conjure up visions. I was staying at a small hotel at the seaside and it was a rainy night. While I was thinking back to my childhood, a vision befell me, forcing me to look at the floorboards full of marks and scratches in utter fascination. I decided to delve deeper into the symbolic content of this vision. In order to encourage my meditative and hallucinatory powers, I made a series of drawings from the floorboards by laying pieces of paper over them quite by chance and then rubbing them with a black pencil. When I looked at the resulting drawings…I was surprised by both a sudden increase in my visionary faculties and by the hallucinatory succession of contradictory and superimposed images which had the intensity and suddenness characteristic of memories of an earlier love.[601]

Several commentators have noted that Ernst alludes to Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*.[602] The "intensity and suddenness" of Ernst's experience proves the power of the imagination's associations (since his experience is hallucinatory—that is, it is fantasy felt with the force of reality), and indicates that the artist is a spectator, astonished before his creation.[603] Notice the passivity in Ernst's narrative: "When I was half asleep…When I

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[599] Elizabeth Legge, 'Zeuxis's Grapes, Novalis's Fossils, Freud's Flowers: Max Ernst's Natural History', *Art History*, 16 (March 1993), pp. 147-172.
[600] Legge, 'Zeuxis's Grapes…', p. 152.
[601] Bischoff, *Max Ernst…*, p. 34.
[602] Bischoff, *Max Ernst…*, pp. 34-36; Spies, *Max Ernst…*, xviii.
[603] Bischoff, *Max Ernst...*, p. 34. Spies concurs: "Frottage is Ernst's contribution to automatism. […] As the creator devotes himself to this activity (or passivity), as he limits his own cooperation with increasing rigorousness, he himself finally becomes the onlooker". Spies, *Max Ernst…*, viii.

was thinking back to…When I looked at the…".[604] The technique of frottage is not determined by rational considerations; instead, it is dictated by the irrational desire to make the inanimate animate, or to bring to life objects that have become dead through their reduction to utility. Even the fake "imitation mahogany" panels can reveal fantastic visions.[605] Ernst also suggests that imagination and reflection ("my meditative and hallucinatory powers"), at least in artistic production, may both be provoked by visions.[606] The technique of frottage tries to uncover, and make present, an imaginative reality that has been suppressed by those conventions that reduce objects to their social functions. Frottage also continues Rimbaud's principle that human sensibility must be disarranged: Ernst's "vision" refers not only to ocular perception, but indicates that different senses may work together, against their usual functions, in order to uncover the hidden potentialities beneath the real.[607] The artist practicing frottage renders the tactile visual, and brings dynamism (rubbing) to rest in a single image (or, alternatively, frottage allows the motion present in stillness to rise to the surface). Thus Ernst's method casts a magic spell over the materials, making them appear equal in the final image, as Spies argues: "The materials in question lose their independent character. Wood, string, leather, crumped paper, stale bread, thread—and whatever else is placed beneath the sheet—undergo a transformation. Ernst equalizes the individual materials."[608] Not only are the materials equalized (as they are stripped of functionality and social value), they are also given a voice: it is the object that expresses itself, not the artist. The materials guide the artist's hand—the artist is not a source but a vehicle.

Consider another work by Ernst, 'Fishbone Forest', constructed using a slightly different technique—grattage.[609] Bischoff describes grattage in the following way: "Grattage (or, roughly translated, scraping) is a transferal of frottage to the medium of

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[604] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*..., p. 34.
[605] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*..., p. 34.
[606] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*..., p. 34.
[607] "The Poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, immense and reasoned *disordering of all the senses*." Arthur Rimbaud, *Selected Poems and Letters*, translated and with an introduction and notes by Jeremy Harding and John Sturrock (London, 2004), pp. 238-239.
[608] Spies, *Max Ernst*…, xxiii. See also Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*…, p. 68.
[609] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*…, p. 41. See Figure 4.

painting."[610] Bischoff notes that grattage uses non-artistic "elements" to achieve its effect—for instance, instead of using a brush, Ernst uses other tools on the canvas.[611] Grattage involves subtraction and displacement, while frottage is a method of passive addition, since the artist is not in control of the patterns added to the surface of the picture (although Ernst, after the rubbing process, did draw over the patterns in order to produce recognizable images).[612] In 'Fishbone Forest', three skulls, of unknown origin, appear on a sloping green hillside. The hillside is hemmed in by two tall, dark structures, which look metallic, and seem to be constructed by human beings. They create an atmosphere of claustrophobia, because they appear taller than the ring in the sky, and because they stand on either side of the image like guards. The green hill descends towards one of the pillars and out of sight, as if signaling the death of nature as it spirals towards monolithic civilized rationality. The 'trees' in the painting look, as the title says, like the spines of fish, and they impart an eerie silence and stillness to the work, as if the bones immobilize each other. Nothing seems to be moving. Many of Ernst's painted works are divided between earth and sky, and some of the most apocalyptic have brilliant blue skies; in this painting, however, the red, orange and yellow colours remind the viewer of a furnace, or a hellish sunset which never ends.[613] The orange and black ring in the sky, which could be either the sun, the moon, a dying star, or an alien planet, disorients the viewer, because we cannot tell the time of day, or what direction we are facing, from looking at the sky.[614]

Adorno's Concept of Technique: Reason Against Reason

Adorno argues that artistic technique must be a critical form of rationality that exposes and negates the instrumental rationality practiced by society. Only reason has the power

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[610] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*..., p. 40.
[611] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*..., p. 40.
[612] Andre Breton, in a footnote to the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism', written in 1924, noted that paintings or drawings considered Surrealist must employ the method of tracing: "Here again it is not a matter of drawing, *but simply of tracing*. […] And, upon opening my eyes, I would get the very strong impression of something 'never seen'." Breton, *Manifestoes*…, p. 21.
[613] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*…, pp. 66-69.
[614] Bischoff, *Max Ernst*…, p. 42.

to heal its own wounds; no other faculty can exercise critique: "Art is rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it; art is not something prerational or irrational, which would peremptorily condemn it as untruth in the face of the entanglement of all human activity in the social totality."[615] Here, Adorno argues that artworks are totally rational, and that artworks must strip themselves of any illusion that they might harbour magical or irrational traces within themselves. For Adorno, irrationality leads directly to myth, which is nothing other than a static natural cycle that is unable to critically reflect upon its own activity. Myth repeats itself unceasingly because it is determined by nature—it does not have a history, unlike true, philosophical rationality, and aesthetic comportment (mimesis). Yet Adorno must recognize that aesthetic behavior—both artistic production and aesthetic reception—necessarily involves elements of irrationality: namely, imaginative mimetic comportment and felt somatic impulses that reason cannot control. The Surrealists traced these impulses back to the subject's unconscious: to dreams and other irrational phenomena. While these phenomena may remain outside the control of reason, they should not be condemned as untrue, because their activity cannot be compared to that of instrumental reason. For instance, imagination, as used by the Surrealists, does not uncritically repeat conventional notions in a timeless vacuum; rather, it tunnels underneath the subject's conventional rational framework in order to show her how nature has been harmed by reason. Thus the unconscious does not present pure or unsullied nature (which does not exist); rather, it presents damaged nature, which is still able to act differently from conventional reason.[616] Adorno would argue that irrational forces should not be relied on because they may easily lead to mythic archetypes that perpetuate unethical principles (for instance, the fascist-nationalist mythology used by the Nazis). While this risk is genuine, and should not be ignored, the same risk is present in reason itself. That is, philosophical reason can easily be persuaded that only ahistorical, formal problems are worthy of academic consideration. We must always assume a critical stance, whether we are dealing with imaginative phenomena, philosophical or irrational cognition. Yet it does not help to completely dismiss one form of cognition entirely without recognizing its virtues.

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[615] AT, p. 71.
[616] Adorno, *Aesthetics*…, p. 77.

Adorno observes: "Cruelty is an element of art's critical reflection on itself; art despairs over the claim to power that it fulfills in being reconciled."[617] Adorno recognizes that technique participates in violence insofar as it is inevitably a product of human culture and history. For instance, even automatic writing, as it was practiced by the Parisian Surrealist group, is unable to divorce itself entirely from the various conventions that structure human communication: syntax, the alphabet, grammar, and the cultural history of the French language. At the same time, technique, as we have seen, results from imaginative and mimetic impulses, and so expresses the suffering of the harmed object as well as the harming subject. Thus technique is not entirely rational: it is also grounded in irrational objectivity. In this way, technique redeems its compulsion to cruelty: it provides an image of dissonant identity which is passive, and not only active.

Adorno also claims that technical rationality differs qualitatively from instrumental rationality: "Art…is entwined with rationalization; this is the source of all of art's means and methods of production…. Yet art mobilizes technique in an opposite direction than does domination."[618] This statement goes against Adorno's other claim—that artistic technique is necessarily violent. Arguably, art is only able to present nature's suffering, and demonstrate that which rationality has suppressed, when it integrates unconscious objectivity and irrational impulses into its own methodology, rather than excluding them. Art integrates the unconscious and the irrational partially through technique that relies on imaginative and impulses—and not only on rationality, no matter how philosophical or critical.

Finally, Adorno admits that artworks are internally divided: they are both irrational and rational. Why should technique—a product of the artist's cultural and historical lineage, as well as her irrational impulses, and of the rational judgment that applies the correct form to organize material—be any different? Adorno claims:

> Art is motivated by a conflict: Its enchantment, a vestige of its magical phase, is constantly repudiated as unmediated sensual immediacy by the progressive disenchantment of the world, yet without its ever being possibly finally to obliterate this magical element. Only in it is art's mimetic character preserved,

[617] AT, p. 65.
[618] AT, p. 70.

> and its truth is the critique that, by its sheer existence, it levels at a rationality that has become absolute.[619]

Artworks' semblance of magical autonomy from empirical society serves, Adorno continues, as an implicit critique of that society, because, according to functional rationality, anything that cannot be valued using social criteria (utility, functionality, and exchangeability) is considered worthless.[620] In the same way, the irrational unconscious impulses that animate technique provide a critique of technique's rational violence merely by standing outside of reason itself.[621] Adorno also affirms that art expresses irrationality: "Artworks do not repress; through expression they help to make present to consciousness the diffuse and elusive without, as psychoanalysis insists, 'rationalization'."[622] How could rationality express that which is not rational ("the diffuse and elusive")?[623] If even aesthetic rationality is guilty of violence, how could it avoid repression?[624] The only possibility is that irrational traces exist within the apparently rational structure of the artist's technique, and the artwork, and that these traces themselves guide aesthetic rationality through mimesis.

Adorno maintains that artistic violence results from mimesis—the imitation of rational violence practiced by a society that reduces the living to the dead, and history to myth. Thus, in his eyes, artistic violence indirectly resists social violence: "The violence done to the material imitates the violence that issued from the material and that endures in its resistance to form."[625] The problem with this argument is that it threatens to result in a vicious circle that presents, but is unable to end or prevent, further violence. If the artwork can *only* imitate violence, without expressing any impulses that, while damaged, still point to otherness or difference, then there seems to be no escape—reification cannot be halted; the cycle of violence engulfs literally everything. If violence were the only reality present for artworks to imitate, they would all express one thing: death. Adorno

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[619] AT, p. 75.
[620] AT, p. 75.
[621] AT, p. 75.
[622] AT, p. 72.
[623] AT, p. 72.
[624] Adorno writes, "What art in the broadest sense works with, it oppresses: This is the ritual of the domination of nature that lives on in play." AT, p. 65.
[625] AT, p. 65.

cannot believe this, because he holds that the semblance of utopia is also part of aesthetic experience, and that nonidentity shocks subjectivity, breaking the ideological spell.[626] So the only way out of the crisis seems to be to allow irrationality a role in both artistic production and aesthetic experience.

Transfigured Night: Surrealism's Transformation of Critical Theory

Now I will shift from a narrow to a broad perspective, so that we may understand the parallels between Surrealism and Critical Theory. Michael Lowy argues that Surrealism is a form of revolutionary Romanticism that seeks to re-enchant the subject's relation to nature.[627] Lowy writes: "Nostalgic for a lost paradise—real or imaginary—Romanticism is in opposition to the melancholic mood of despair, to the quantifying mind of the bourgeois universe, to commercial reification, to the platitudes of utilitarianism, and above all, to the disenchantment of the world."[628] While mere nostalgia would be regressive, Surrealism always tempers its longing with material engagement—that is, with the suffering and unconscious trauma present socially and individually. Lowy continues that, according to Breton, Surrealism seeks to revive art's ancient origins in magic, in order to re-enchant the world.[629] Such re-enchantment fights against the disenchantment perpetuated by capitalism and philosophical Idealism and also revives the repressed magical or mimetic aspect of artworks.[630] Adorno agrees with Breton that artworks operate under a mimetic "taboo" that silences their magical origins.[631] However, Adorno implicitly argues that, for the Surrealist project to succeed, it must overcome various obstacles: first, it must resist the violent appropriation of myth by fascism and the Nazis; second, it must not succumb to the illusion of positivity; third, it must carefully balance the artwork's divided nature as both magical (mimetic) and rational

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[626] AT, p. 307.

[627] Michael Lowy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, introduction by Donald LaCoss (Austin, Texas, 2009).

[628] Lowy, *Morning Star*…., p. 29.
[629] Lowy, *Morning Star*…., p. 37.
[630] Lowy, *Morning Star*…., p. 37.
[631] AT, pp. 53-54.

(constructive); and fourth, it must somehow internally critique or reflect upon its own inheritance. This last aspect is necessary if mythology is to avoid simply reproducing ideology, and if it is to be genuinely new.

What might scholars of Critical Theory teach Surrealist artists and writers, and what may Surrealist artists and writers gain from scholars of Critical Theory? Is it possible to reconcile the two methods, which at first glance appear to be opposites? Arguably, the contradiction between the two methods teaches us something about the divided nature of the artwork, and about the collision between rationality and imagination in subjectivity. First, we will uncover what the Surrealist method might gain from the method of Critical Theory, as Adorno practices it in *Aesthetic Theory*. Second, we may turn to the blind spots of Critical Theory's method, and learn what Surrealist thought and practice might impart to it.

> In his essay on Surrealism, Blanchot writes:
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> in automatic writing…the word and my freedom are now no more than one. […] Surrealists became well aware…of the strange nature of words: they saw that words have their own spontaneity. For a long time, language had laid claim to a kind of particular existence. It refused simple transparency, it was not just a gaze, an empty means of seeing; it existed, it was a concrete thing and even a coloured thing. Surrealists understood, moreover, that language is not an inert thing: it has a life of its own, and a latent power that escapes us.[632]

Blanchot's analysis is striking: language, when not communicative or instrumental rationality does not rein it in, is possessed by life; further, it is wholly "spontaneous," and exceeds any attempt at determination.[633] Thus automatic writing proceeds without any direction from the subjective ego, and, in the same way, Ernst's technical methods are generated from his imaginative impulses, his sense of the requirements of the artistic material, and his ability to reflect on his imagination's immanent direction. At the same time, there is a troubling principle operating in the above passage that never becomes quite explicit. It is that language operates as a spontaneous power that resists materiality and which may reconcile rational thought with its object. Blanchot assumes that, for the

[632] Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 217.
[633] Caws, *Surrealism…*, p. 217.

Surrealists, language operates roughly as freedom does for Kant: as a realm that cannot be determined by material, sensuous, or historical considerations. While the unconscious may experience moments of autonomy from reason's control, it cannot be autonomous from materiality, because the unconscious realm is receptive to, and takes its content from, the social, historical, and natural world that humans participate in and engage with every day (and every night, in dreams). Thus the unconscious, while it may be spontaneous to a degree, cannot be theorized as purely spontaneous, because that would negate the Surrealists' attempts to uncover and critique objective reality through unconscious images and associations. It is the resistance between the rational and the unconscious that rises to the surface in dreams, and in nightmares—not the absolute isolation of either faculty.

> In another passage, Blanchot states that, for the Surrealists,
> the reality of man is not of the nature of things that are. It is not given, it must be conquered; it is always outside of itself. […] Poetry and life are 'elsewhere'…but 'elsewhere' does not designate a spiritual or temporal region; elsewhere is nowhere; it is not the beyond; it signifies that existence is never where it is.[634]

Blanchot observes insightfully that imagination is a visionary faculty that both listens to historical-social reality and displaces it at the same time; thus, utopia is always negatively present in poetic production—and in everyday experience. Blanchot argues that, for the Surrealists, poetry overcomes aesthetic alienation by acting as a diagnostic and healing force for subjectivity: it names a kind of comportment towards reality that listens to the revolutionary potential within objects. Blanchot alludes to Breton's statement that "Existence is elsewhere."[635] We may interpret this line dialectically: existence (or empirical society) is always displaced; reality refers to otherness or difference, which in turn refers to reality. This is how everyday objects are appropriated and transformed in Dadaist and Surrealist art.

It is telling however that Blanchot seems to read Breton's principle ontologically rather than historically—that is, objects necessarily contain their own negation, and do not require historical possibility in order to gain a measure of redemption. Surrealist

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[634] Caws, *Surrealism*…, p. 218.
[635] Breton, *Manifestoes*…, p. 47.

artists, writers, and scholars should accept that modern historical conditions have damaged experience, and that myth cannot be simply regained (or exhumed) without a critical method of retrieval. Adorno's concept of interpretation provides such a method. In accordance with Blanchot's reading, Adorno's notion of utopia should not be interpreted as a wholly transcendent or spiritual location, which would immediately reify and constrict the concept; rather, it ought to be read as a negative state of experience, or as a process (both for the individual and for the collective), in which subjectivity would be able to listen to materiality, to reflect upon it, and to imagine otherness without fear, without the desire for self-preservation, and without utilitarian considerations. While it may be impossible to represent this state, because of the historical and social mechanisms of repression, it may be negatively, or distortedly, presented in Surrealist art. In order to achieve this, the subject must feel otherness (unconscious nature) within herself—those chaotic forces that circulate within rationality.

Georges Bataille's essay on humankind and animality, while fascinating and provocative, also fails to view the subject's relation to nature as historical and social; he instead views nature as a primarily spiritual and anarchic freedom that shatters rational discourse.[636] Bataille agrees with Adorno that human beings have dominated nature.[637] He writes that, when nature's power suddenly asserts itself, we see "the black possibilities of non-sense…. This unlimited discharge belongs rather to the realm of dream: it defines a divine possibility. […] Its essence is to be sacred, terrible and ungraspable…[it] leads to death and goes beyond it."[638] Bataille wishes to resurrect the "unknown" that circulates within subjectivity.[639]

Yet Surrealist artists and writers must realize that Surrealism's recourse to magic is itself determined by historical forces, and that it operates within rationalized social discourses. For example, institutionalized religion, industrial-capitalist civilization, and science all contributed to the repression of magical practices deemed irrational in

[636] Georges Bataille, 'The Friendship of Man and Beast', in Ades, Richardson, and Fijalkowski, *The Surrealism Reader*…, pp. 130-131.
[637] Bataille, 'The Friendship of…', p. 130.
[638] Bataille, 'The Friendship of…', p. 131.
[639] Bataille, 'The Friendship of…', p. 130.

Enlightenment's infancy.[640] Further, magic itself was a method of dominating nature, as the Surrealists acknowledge.[641] Thus any attempt to rehabilitate magic, or enchantment, or nature, must turn at the same time to history, to reason, and to disenchantment. This is one dialectical principle that scholars of Surrealism might learn from scholars of Critical Theory: nature is history, and history is nature.[642] Scholars of Surrealism should acknowledge that the unconscious forces that Surrealism relies upon to produce freedom are embedded in social and historical contexts that never entirely disappear.

How might Critical Theory amend its method so that it loses its antagonism towards Surrealism? Consider the following passage by Blanchot:

> Surrealists […] loose their fury on discourse; they take away from it any right usefully to mean something; fiercely they break discourse as a means for social relationships, for precise designation. […] language disappears as an instrument, but only because it has become subject. […] it is human freedom acting and manifesting itself. […] [The Surrealists argue that] language does not have to be *used*, that it does not have to serve to express something, that it is free, freedom itself.[643]

Scholars of Critical Theory should acknowledge that subjectivity relies on imagination as a power or capacity for engaging with otherness (defined as encompassing nature and objectivity) in a non-rational, yet critical, and non-instrumental manner. Blanchot's analysis in the passage above, that language possesses its own forcefulness and agency, suffers from his assumption that language is autonomous from social and historical forces; nevertheless, Adorno would accept that language's capacity to mimetically express suffering occurs when the subject employs her fantasy, or imagination, to develop technical possibilities. Further, both Blanchot and Adorno agree that language must escape instrumental or pragmatic functionality.

In addition, Adorno's concept of utopia, although irreducibly negative, requires a moment of re-enchantment if it is to succeed in reviving the expressive-mimetic

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[640] Lowy, *Morning Star*…., p. 37.
[641] Rene Alleau, 'The Exit from Egypt', in Ades, Richardson, and Fijalkowski, *The Surrealism Reader*…, p. 182.
[642] Deborah Cook, *Adorno on Nature* (Durham, 2011), pp. 1-4.
[643] Caws, *Surrealism*…, p. 217.

dimension of subjective experience, and of the artwork. Otherwise utopia would simply signify false consciousness—the disenchanted world. If it is to avoid nihilism, Adorno's concept of utopia must re-enchant experience. Thus there is a dialectic of disenchantment and re-enchantment in aesthetic experience. The re-enchantment inherent in utopian impulses is not identical to a conception of positive transcendence, which Adorno rightly condemns in Hegel as conservative, abstract, and as bound to a teleological conception of history. Re-enchantment looks for traces of possibility amid debility—for instance, the Surrealist practice of finding discarded or thrown away objects that emanate hidden historical and revolutionary forces.[644] For this reason, the Surrealist model of re-enchantment parallels Adorno's concept of redemption: both seek to ignite and revive potentiality that otherwise would be lost or repressed. Such potentiality resides, hidden, in objects: in everyday objects for the Surrealists, and in aesthetic objects for the Critical Theorist. Thus Surrealism, and Adorno's unique version of Critical Theory, both rely on a negative model of utopia. For Adorno, the object's semblance of utopia is activated by its dialectic of critique and hope; for the Surrealists, the utopian promise arrives with the dialectic between the fantastic and the ordinary.

For the Surrealists and for Adorno, the imagination is a radically passive faculty that is able to interpret and reconfigure material reality through reflecting on its fantastic possibilities. Reason cannot anticipate utopia; it can only reflect on given materiality, and has a limited capacity for future-oriented vision that is free from logical strictures. This is why the artwork, as well as aesthetic experience, must involve both mimetic comportment and constructive rationality. Thus imagination is necessary for philosophical reflection, aesthetic experience, and artistic production.

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[644] Walter Benjamin and the Surrealists share a fascination with the historical potentiality contained in objects. According to Malt, "Benjamin described his own critical method as 'an attempt to capture the portrait of history in the most insignificant representations of reality, its scraps, as it were.' […] For Benjamin, what Breton calls 'un mythe collectif' and 'le tresor collectif'—the collective capital of images—is expressed in concrete form in the marginalia of everyday existence, and can be decoded to reveal the ideological and historical processes by which they come to take on a specific material form. […] the latent content of these images can produce a revolutionary energy". Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire…*, p. 38.

Critical Theory must make its dependence on imagination and unconscious expression explicit, and ought to reflect upon the relation between reason and imagination if is not to sublimate unconsciousness into consciousness—or mimesis into rationality. Such a move would be reactive rather than revolutionary. Conversely, Surrealism must acknowledge that its own historical conditions to some extent determine the effectiveness of its method of automatism or chance, and its adherence to the tradition of magic in art and culture. Both ought to remember Adorno's observation that "...art is supposed to be, like love, spontaneous, involuntary; and unconscious."[645]

[645] AT, p. 350.

Conclusion

In the last section of *Minima Moralia*, entitled '*Finale*,' Adorno writes: "The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption."[646] Although tradition, as we have discussed, must be negated in order to critically dispel its frozen content, it also must be considered "from the perspective of redemption"—that is, we must assume that the possibility of hope, or at least displacement, inheres in tradition through the historical experience of suffering.[647] Thus a moment of animation inheres in philosophical critique. I have tried to examine how Adorno criticizes and redeems various aesthetic concepts in Kant's third *Critique*, and how *Aesthetic Theory* addresses the balance between philosophical reflection, aesthetic experience, and history. It is necessary to achieve such balance if the relationship between subject and object is to avoid violence. From Hohendahl's perspective, "For Adorno the concept of progress operates on two levels: a secular and a theological or metaphysical one for which the idea of redemption has to stand in…through the notion of redemption a force comes into play that humanity does not control...Human agency is not denied, but its scope is limited to human history."[648] Hohendahl's account is not entirely accurate. We have seen that, for Adorno, metaphysical experience is not identical to theological experience; instead, it is firmly grounded in history. Thus, Adorno does not need to reply on a theological model of redemption, because redemption is not only "limited" to human history; rather, redemption for Adorno only properly arises when such history is acknowledged and experienced—with the full force of its materiality.[649] Only through experiencing and reflecting upon the suffering of the past, and the guilty practices that perpetuate such suffering, and which obscure humanity's self-knowledge in the present, will redemption as a concept free itself from its own tradition of obscurantist

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[646] MM, p. 247.
[647] MM, p. 247.

[648] Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'Progress Revisited: Adorno's Dialogues with Augustine, Kant, and Benjamin', *Critical Inquiry*, 40 (Autumn 2013), p. 252.
[649] Hohendahl, 'Progress Revisited…', p. 252.

mysticism, and transform itself into a material force to be reckoned with—and one that gestures towards utopian futures.

Of course, not all scholars accept Adorno's arguments. Thierry de Duve accuses Adorno of dogmatism; he claims that, "wherever Kant presupposes innate universal conditions of possibility, [Adorno] refer[s] to sedimented history and ingrained social habits instead".[650] Adorno recognizes that history has the power to reshape and distort experience, and that subjectivity should not be considered to be independent of objectivity: that is, culture, nature, history, and society. We have seen how, in particular, the history of the twentieth century presents the regressive decline of Enlightenment, which forces reason to become irrational. De Duve claims that Adorno often imposes a Hegelian reading onto Kant: "[Adorno's] aesthetic theory is fraught with Hegelian readings of Kantian issues...solvable antinomies interpreted as irresolvable contradictions, ideas of reason recast as moments of spirit, ethical imperatives rewritten as historical programs, and so on".[651] Yet this is only partially true. Adorno's reception of Hegel is highly complex, and it would impossible to do justice to the topic here. Adorno is extremely critical of several key Hegelian concepts: the progressive or teleological nature of dialectic, the concept of spirit as an overarching narrative that captures particularity, and the idea that conceptuality, rather than materiality, adequately describes subjective experience.[652] Adorno's reception of Hegel is similar to his reception of Kant: the kernels of transcendence (that is, utopian truth content, which arises from historical circumstance but is not determined by it) must be disentangled from the web of immanence (that which, in any philosophy, is determined by historical circumstances). Adorno does not simply accept Hegel's reading of Kant against Kant's own account; if he did so, Adorno would fall prey to the accusation that he accepts a simplistic teleological or historicist view of history, in which each thinker automatically replaces the next in a

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[650] De Duve, 'Resisting Adorno…', p. 257.
[651] De Duve, 'Resisting Adorno…', p. 258.
[652] Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, Shierry Weber Nicholsen (trans), (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1999), pp. 70-72, 87. See also Goehr, *Elective Affinities*…, 2008.

series of more progressive iterations.[653] Adorno's reading of Kant is motivated, as we have seen, by Adorno's own concerns, which cannot be reduced to that of any other thinker.

We may also address another concern. How is it possible to employ the categories that emerge from the philosophical tradition while still critically examining the ways in which history has changed them? It is necessary for the modern subject to adopt a dual perspective towards traditional categories: we must be both critical and receptive at once. The model for this attitude may be found in aesthetic experience, in which the subject ideally loses her determinative ego, and all the resulting social conventions that oppress her, while also thinking through her own experience, and the object's expression. This contradiction is also present in the subject's relation to tradition, and the past:

> To insist on the absolute absence of tradition is as naïve as the obstinate insistence on it. Both are ignorant of the past that persists in their allegedly pure relation to objects; both are unaware of the dust and debris which cloud their allegedly clear vision. But it is inhuman to forget because accumulated suffering will be forgotten and the historical trace on things, words, colors and sounds is always of past suffering. Thus tradition today poses an insoluble contradiction. There is no tradition today and none can be conjured, yet when every tradition has been extinguished the march towards barbarism will begin.[654]

To be ignorant of the past means to repress the materiality that determines the present—of the scars and "accumulated suffering" that leaves its mark in experience.[655] There is "no tradition today" because the official narratives that have reigned over art history (and the Western tradition generally) have lost their value and been proven false; on the other hand, it is "inhuman to forget" tradition (considered as particular and transient moments of the past) because when the suffering of the past is rendered invisible or considered

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[653] Thanks to Nick Lawrence for reminding me of the dangers of this approach in my own research.
[654] Adorno, 'On Tradition', p. 78.
[655] Adorno, 'On Tradition', p. 78.

worthless, real individuals are harmed in the name of abstract values.[656] This is why the positivist method of clear and distinct perception ("allegedly clear vision"), which stretches from Cartesian rationalism in the seventeenth century to analytic philosophy in the twentieth century, is lacking in self-knowledge: it aims to "extinguish" the social-historical traces left in language, in order to reduce it to a system of signs that function like mathematical formulae—that is, symbols that may be abstracted from the materiality that surrounds them.[657] For this reason, philosophical thought must not abstract away from historical experience, which is present in the very methods and techniques that such thought employs to research its objects. As discussed earlier, automatic writing emerged from the ruins of the First World War, as a method of excavating the unconscious irrationality that grounds the subject's apparent rationality.[658] The Surrealists realized that it was necessary to engage with the forces that distorted and damaged rationality—even if that meant delving into irrationality itself. Thus, we should not assume that our methods are untainted by irrational prejudice, desire, fear, or immoral considerations; rather, we ought to reflect on how historical and social experience has affected our perspective—even that perspective that we consider to be the most philosophical, rational, moral, humane, and transcendent. For instance, the urgency of the present climate crisis should provoke us to imagine a different relationship to nature than one of domination and destruction.[659]

Why isn't Adorno's inheritance of Kant simply conservative, or a blatant attempt at restoration rather than revolution? Adorno avoids conservatism because he wants to wholly transform the old concepts—and not simply to reform them. Adorno returns to traditional concepts; however, he perceives that that which has been discarded has the most likely potential to be carried forth into the future, and transformed into something new.

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[656] Adorno, 'On Tradition', p. 78.
[657] Adorno, 'On Tradition', p. 78.
[658] Klingsohr-Leroy, *Surrealism*, p. 8.

[659] Christina Gerhardt, 'The Ethics of Animals in Adorno and Kafka', *New German Critique*, 97 (Winter, 2006), pp. 163.

Let us briefly return to the first quote in the Introduction: "One must have tradition in oneself, to hate it properly".[660] Now we can reflect on the meaning of what Adorno might mean. 'Hatred' may be re-described as a form of negation. I have argued that the critical salvaging of the past (that is, the philosophical and aesthetic tradition) constitutes one of the invisible actions that *Aesthetic Theory* performs. We may use our analysis of Adorno's reception of Kant to reconfigure the meaning of negation.

The concept of negation has often been conceived of in explicitly spatial terms. For instance, Hegel's threefold structure of cancellation, preservation, and transformation or raising up (*Aufhebung*) suggests that negation is matter of shifting, retaining, and restructuring a pattern or knowledge, or an object. Yet negation, at least as Adorno conceives of it, should be described using temporal metaphors, such as repression or forgetting, presencing or occurring, and anticipatory reconstitution. If we think of negation in these terms, we gain several important insights. We learn that negation is not simply about erasure, because the repressed object never disappears completely—in the same way that tradition, while it may appear differently, grounds the past, the present, and the future. We also learn that negation does not merely preserve the object in a static state; instead, it brings the object to awareness, and thus alters the experience of the subject, and the object itself. Finally, negation involves acting on the subject's experience of the future, and thus involves the possibility of possibility itself—that is, of utopia, conceived negatively, as Adorno, as well as the Dadaists, and Surrealists, did.

Krebber has perceptively observed that concepts in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* are not static; rather, they function dialectically, akin to liquefied objects that gradually metamorphose as Adorno's argument progresses. Thus philosophical concepts, conceived dialectically, are always shifting and never stable; to hold them in view is to realize that one's own position is constantly unsettled by historical and social reality.[661] We have seen, through examining the historical sediment expressed in Adornian concepts, that such concepts correspond, at least in part, with Kantian aesthetic concepts. We can now see, further, that Kant's own concepts have no stable reference point—or solid ground—where we should locate their origin, in order to understand them once and for all. Rather,

[660] MM, p. 52.
[661] I am grateful to André Krebber for making this clear to me, in a private conversation.

historical analysis can only proceed on the assumption that its perspective is, like those objects it seeks to examine, ever-shifting, fragile, and fluid.

Another advantage of our analysis of *Aesthetic Theory*'s Kantian inheritance is that it demonstrates how, in responding to various Kantian concepts, Adorno develops some of the central components in his own philosophical architecture. For instance, Joel Whitebook notes that "[t]he only way to solve the problem [of identity thinking's coercion, JNK]—this is Adorno's main anti-Kantian claim—is to reintroduce the moment of nature that was 'eliminated in this abstraction [from empirical reality].' He calls this moment 'the addendum.'"[662] In other words, Adorno pursues his own solution to Kant's idealism, which reduces the particular to a mere moment of the universal; he does not follow Hegel, Schopenhauer, or Schelling in attempting to reduce nature or sensuousness to an aspect of conceptuality or Spirit. While some commentators assume that Adorno's critique of identity thinking is a response to Hegel alone, Whitebook and other scholars point out that Kant remains a crucial target.[663] Whitebook also argues that Adorno's materialism is indebted to Freud in that the latter's conception of freedom, instead of being grounded in spontaneity, as it is for Kant, is grounded in "the drives", or natural materiality.[664] For both Adorno and Freud, the self must free itself from the internal mechanisms of repression that seek to authoritatively silence any dissenting voices—such as the subject's animal nature, or her sensuous experience. Whitebook notes that, according to Kantian philosophy, "...the unity of the self must necessarily be *coercive*".[665] Kant might respond that such coercion is necessary in order to impose organization on a chaotic aggregate of impulses and inclinations; however, in the context of

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[662] Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects…', p. 66.

[663] For examples of the former, see Hammer, 'Minding the World…', p. 97; A. T. Nuyen, 'Adorno and the French Post-Structuralists on the Other of Reason', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 4, (1990), pp. 310-322; Brian O'Connor, 'The Concept of Mediation in Hegel and Adorno', *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 39/40 (1999), pp. 84-95. For the latter, see Hohendahl, 'Nature and the Autonomy…', pp. 248-249; Stark, 'The Dignity of the Particular…', Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*….

[664] Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects', p. 66.

[665] Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects', p. 68.

Enlightenment's distortion and misrecognition of its own internal nature, such coercion results in harmful violence towards the self, as well as towards external otherness.

Finally, we can see that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* contains certain concepts that need to be re-considered and revised in light of the historical and social events that characterize modernity. Kant's ideas concerning aesthetics must be challenged because they no longer may be assumed to be true for subjects' aesthetic experience. In some cases, Kant's ideas have lost their value or truth; in others, Kant's ideas promote an ideal for aesthetic experience that should be abandoned.

Adorno's approach to aesthetics is ethically important because it allows subjects to experience objectivity and truth-content, and to break through, briefly, the ideological veil that obscures the subject's experience. Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment seeks to establish the subject's control over an aesthetic object through the feeling of pleasure and aesthetic ideas, which are subjective impositions that do not arise from the material and historical determinations of the object. It is vital for subjects to experience nonidentity, and to reflect upon truth-content, because they impart that which is not captured through social ideology. Nonidentity and truth-content also allow the subject to resist fixed and deadening categories that distort the true image of the world. It is immoral to accept an untrue image of the world because such an image causes the mutilation of objects and the repression of subjective impulses—impulses that might trace the history of objects in order to understand their mediated nature.[666]

At last, we can try to answer some of the questions we raised in the Introduction. The relationship between art and philosophy is determined by history, and the need to both express and radicalize historical experience. Art requires philosophical mediation if it is to avoid uncritically repeating reality; philosophy requires art in order to ground itself in materiality, which is especially necessary after the natural-historical crises of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We have also learned, through analyzing Adorno's concept of interpretation, that art and philosophy are not polar opposites. Rather, their processes are mediated through each other: art has its own agency, and it is imperative that philosophical thought listens to material experience. History is present to experience

[666] AT, p. 245.

in different ways: in the altered material that artworks develop; in the categories available to philosophical thought; in the everyday social habits that we assume to be second nature; and in our orientation to the future, to the present, and to the past. It is only possible to stop ourselves from blindly reproducing the past by attending to, and reflecting upon, the historical experience within our subjectivity, and in objectivity. In this way we might avoid myth, and gain a glimpse—even a very brief, negative, illumination—of true enlightenment. The traditions of the past may only 'continue', in a critical and enlightened sense, when they have been thoroughly reflected upon—negated and transformed—and when their false moments have been brought to a standstill. This task is of course endless—and converges with the infinity of philosophical inquiry, aesthetic production, and interpretation.

Figure 1

Hans Arp

Untitled (The Entombment of the Birds and Butterflies: Head of Tzara), 1916-17

Painted wooden relief

40 x 32.5 x 9.5 cm (16 x 13 x 4 in)

Collection, Kunsthaus, Zurich

Figure 2

Kurt Schwitters

Das Unbild (The And Picture), 1919

Collage/assemblage

35.5 x 28 cm (14 x 11 in)

Collection, Staatsgallerie, Stuttgart

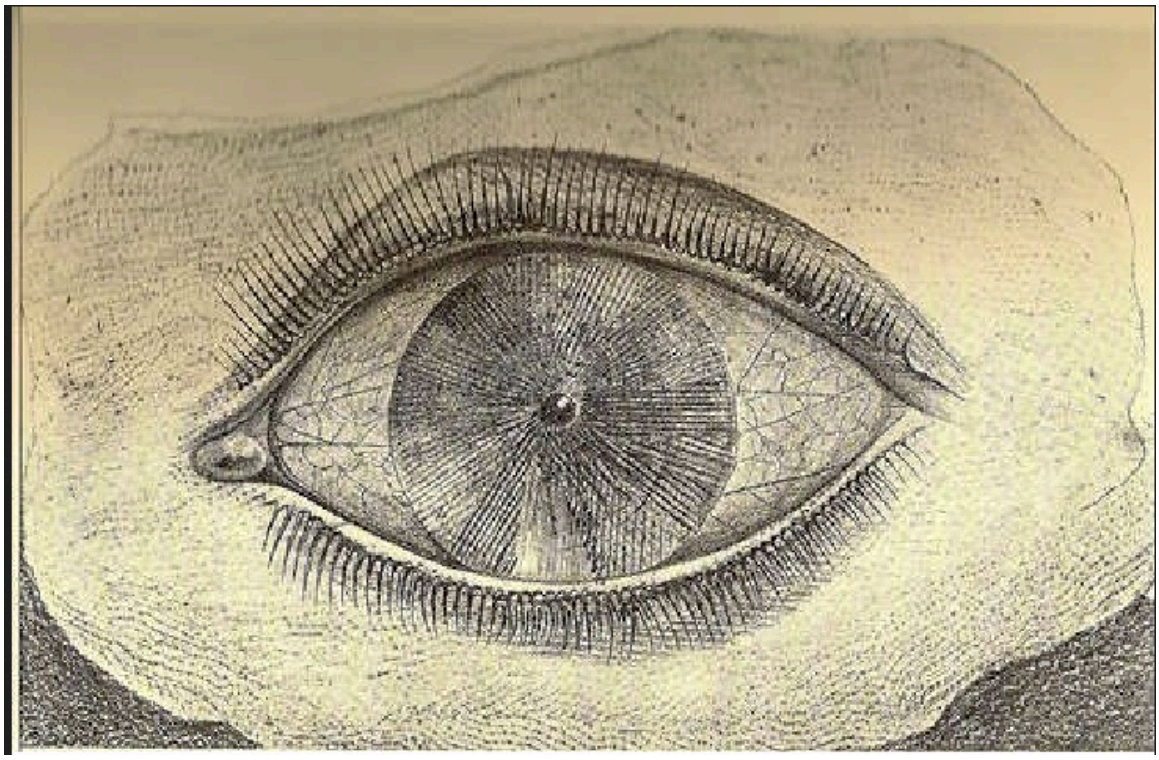

Figure 3

Max Ernst

La Roue de la Lumiere (The Wheel of Light), 1925

No. 29 of the Histoire naturelle series,

Frottage, pencil on paper,

26 x 43 cm (10 1/4 x 16 15/15)

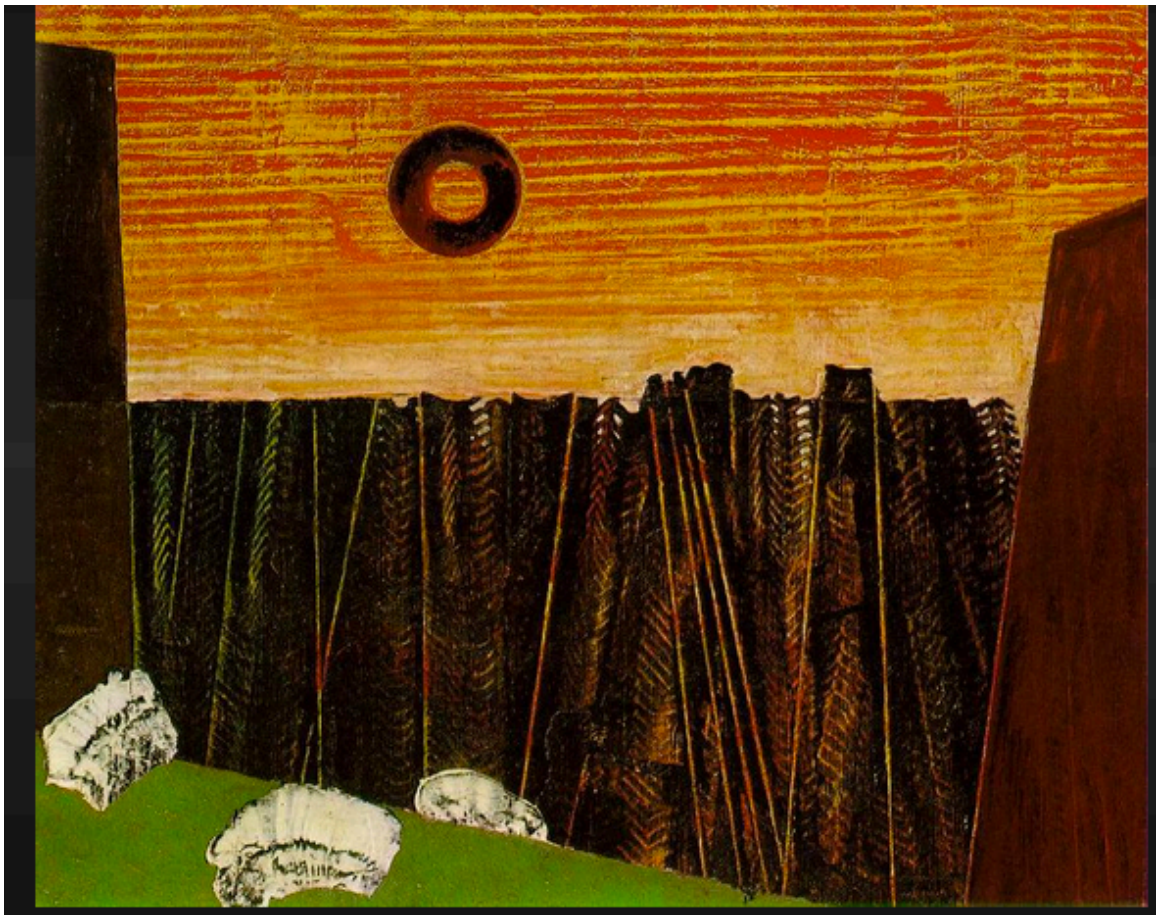

Figure 4

Max Ernst

Foret-aretes (*Fishbone Forest)*, 1927

Oil on canvas,

54 x 65 cm,

Galerie Beyeler, Basle

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